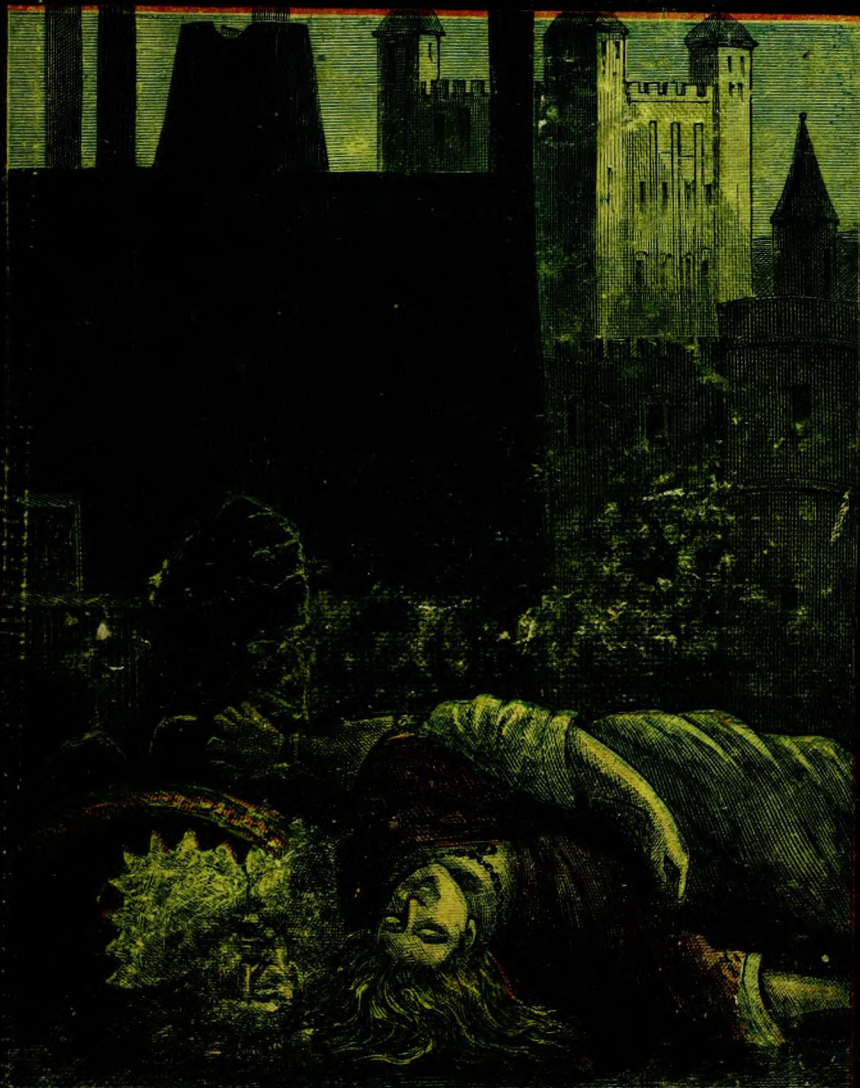


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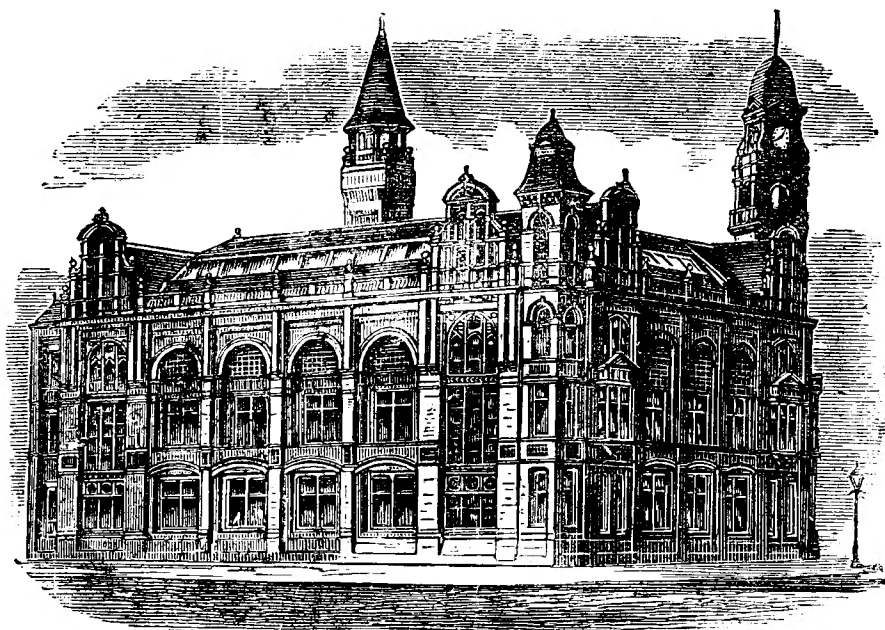
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STRAFFORD

A Romance

BY

H. BARTON BAKER

AUTHOR OF

"FRENCH SOCIETY FROM THE FRONDE TO THE GREAT REVOLUTION," ETC.

LONDON

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CONTENTS.

Book I.—At Wentworth-Woodhouse.

	CHAPTER I.	PAGE
ETHEL		7
	CHAPTER II.	
THE BRAWL		15
	CHAPTER III.	
SIR THOMAS WENTWORTH		24
	CHAPTER IV.	
DENZIL HOLLIS		30
	CHAPTER V.	
THE DUEL		35
	CHAPTER VI.	
SUMMONED BY THE KING		43

Book II.—At Court.

	CHAPTER I.	
THE KING		49
	CHAPTER II.	
HENRIETTA MARIA		54
	CHAPTER III.	
LUCY, COUNTESS OF CARLISLE		60
	CHAPTER IV.	
AT ANTONY VANDYKE'S		75

Book III.—In the Shadow of Death.

	CHAPTER I.	PAGE
A WINTER'S EVENING		83
	CHAPTER II.	
MY LORD PRESIDENT OF THE NORTH		90
	CHAPTER III.	
SUNDERED LIVES.		94
	CHAPTER IV.	
LAUNCELOT'S HOME		101
	CHAPTER V.	
DEATH		106

Book IV.—The Mutterings of the Tempest.

	CHAPTER I.	
AT THE SPRING GARDEN		113
	CHAPTER II.	
IN COUNCIL		123
	CHAPTER III.	
THE MASK OF PEACE		134
	CHAPTER IV.	
THE SONG OF THE SIREN		141
	CHAPTER V.	
THE SECRET MEETING		148
	CHAPTER VI.	
THE REVEALING OF A SECRET		156

Book V.—The Promise to the Dead.

	CHAPTER I.	
MEMORIES		162
	CHAPTER II.	
AT THE TOMB		169
	CHAPTER III.	
ETHEL'S LOVE		179

CONTENTS.

5

	PAGE
CHAPTER IV.	
AN UNWELCOME VISITOR	184
CHAPTER V.	
PLOTTING	190
CHAPTER VI.	
THE FALCON AND THE DOVE	199

Book VII.—Destiny.

CHAPTER I.	
A STARTLING RENCONTRE	208
CHAPTER II.	
HORNBY'S PLEDGE	218
CHAPTER III.	
A RESCUE AND A REVELATION	227
CHAPTER IV.	
"THINE FOR EVER"	235
CHAPTER V.	
GONE! NO ONE KNEW WHITHER	244

Book VIII.—The Gathering of the Storm.

PROEM. IRELAND, 1632	246
CHAPTER I.	
IRELAND, 1639	250
CHAPTER II.	
THE COMING OF THE LION	258
CHAPTER III.	
HOW THE KING REWARDED DEVOTION	263
CHAPTER IV.	
NEVERMORE!	267
CHAPTER V.	
EARL OF STRAFFORD	277
CHAPTER VI.	
IN THE CAMP	282

	CHAPTER VII.	PAGE
THE GREAT COUNCIL OF PEERS . . .		288
	CHAPTER VIII.	
THE KING'S PLEDGE . . .		294
	CHAPTER IX.	
PRONOUNCING DOOM . . .		299
	CHAPTER X.	
AN OLD FRIEND . . .		302
	CHAPTER XI.	
HONOUR FOR HONOUR . . .		309
	CHAPTER XII.	
IRREVOCABLE		314

Book VIII.—The Block.

	CHAPTER I.	
THE IMPEACHMENT . . .		317
	CHAPTER II.	
THE TRIAL		325
	CHAPTER III.	
TOLD AT LAST		337
	CHAPTER IV.	
THE KING SIGNS		340
	CHAPTER V.	
THE BITTERNESS OF LIFE . . .		349
	CHAPTER VI.	
THE LAST APPEALS		354
	CHAPTER VII.	
THE LAST PARTING		364
	CHAPTER VIII.	
UPON THE SCAFFOLD		369
	CHAPTER IX.	
AT THE FOOT OF THE SCAFFOLD		377

STRAFFORD.

Book I.—At Wentworth-Woodhouse.

CHAPTER I.

ETHEL.

It was a hot bright day in the August of the year 1628 : it was some time past the hour of noon, and the heat was at its highest, the white glare of the dusty road was almost as painful to the eye as the glowing sunlight above, and man and beast crept close in to the shadows, grateful for any shelter, however bare, from the scorching rays that seemed to pour down in molten fire upon him. Seldom was heat so intense felt in a district of England so far north as Yorkshire.

Beneath a clump of trees that overhung a heavy wooden gate leading into a stretch of ground, half wood, half park, rested a young gentleman on horseback. It was a cool pleasant prospect for a hot summer's day upon which his eye rested. There were bosquets of overgrown brambles, there were decaying limbs which last winter's storms had torn from the trees, lying hither and thither, and the grass and the tall brake fern covered the ground in uncut luxuriance ; there were thickets of noble trees unthinned by any prodigal heir ; there were shadowy dells that might have been the chosen haunts of the fairies, and there was a broad expanse of water starred with the blossoms of the water-lily, upon the margin of which, beneath leafy shadows, congregated a herd of deer.

Let us now turn our gaze from the landscape to the man.

He was very young, seemingly scarcely more than twenty, with pale but handsome features, dark blue eyes, contemplative and dreamy, the whole countenance imbued with an expression of studious melancholy; his fair hair hung in natural ringlets to his shoulders. His dress was dark and plain but was unmistakably that of a gentleman.

The sight of the cool green herbage, so inviting to his parched mouth, made the horse grow restive, he champed his bit, snorted and pawed the ground in dumb persuasion. But his rider heeded not these promptings, until out of one of the sleepy hollows there rose the fluttering of a lady's dress. Then the cavalier's grave face suddenly lighted up as though a new soul had been breathed into it. He dismounted, and lifting the wooden bar, which alone secured the gate, passed through, and, leading his horse by the bridle, made towards the apparition.

It was such a form as Spenser might have dreamed of when Una first rose upon his mind's eye. Delicate in outline, yet undulating, too youthful for fully developed womanhood, yet gently rounded in its due proportions; tall enough for grace, but not for stateliness, and exquisitely set off by a simple flowing dress of white and pale blue. Her hair was of that fair auburn which grows luminous in the sun, but fades to a flaxen in a dimmer light, as though it reflected the golden rays that were shed upon it; its waving tresses, flowing to the waist, were gathered loosely in a blue ribbon, while upon the low white forehead it lay in those pretty curls which we see so frequently in the portraits of Vandyke. Her eyes were of the deepest violet, large, thoughtful, but not dreamy, although full of gentleness and poetry; her complexion was ever varying with each changing thought, one moment colourless as a lily, or perhaps just tinged with the delicate pink of the wood anemone, the next bright as a damask rose. And over all there was such perfect refinement in the oval contour of the face, the small rounded chin, the straight, perfectly chiselled nose and the delicate lips; there was no line of sensuousness in all her beauty, yet all was soft—hauteur had no more place there than voluptuousness, neither was it weak in its gentleness; a painter might have given such a face to a Joan of Arc or to a Christian martyr.

Winding among the shadows, arranging a bouquet of wild flowers, and undisturbed by the noiseless footfall of

horse and master, which scarcely made a sound upon the thick grass, she was unconscious of the presence of the intruder, who was half hidden by the trees, until the word "Ethel" caused her to start and raise her face all aglow with surprise, but it was as instantly shadowed.

"Launcelot—Mr. Franklin!"

"I have surprised you, and not agreeably, but not purposely," he said quickly. "I drew up my horse beneath the shadow of the trees that overhang the gate yonder, and as I looked into the park I saw you emerging from that hollow. I could not resist the opportunity of speaking to you, even though I should be reproved for my pains."

His hurt tone melted the shadows from her face and her heart.

"I do not reprove you," she answered gently, "unless it be for your own sake; these meetings can only increase your unhappiness; it is for your sake, not mine, I once more implore you that they shall cease."

"There can be to me no unhappiness greater than comes of banishment from your presence," he answered sadly; "in it I can forget the present and the future, it is to me what sleep is to the wretch condemned to die—forgetfulness."

He was leaning against the trunk of one of the grand old trees, while his horse, with bridle on neck, was quietly browsing the herbage at his feet. Ethel stood at a little distance, with pale and troubled face, tremblingly plucking the petals of a water-lily.

There was silence for several seconds, then suddenly, by an impulsive movement, she cast the flowers from her, and advancing towards him, placed her hand gently but timidly upon his arm, and said softly:

"Launcelot, this weakness is unworthy of you, it would be unworthy of a common man, much less of you with your noble intellect, your grand learning, your brave, noble heart. Such men as you have a higher mission upon earth than to waste precious lives upon a dream of woman's love. We can never be aught to each other. You know your father would never consent to such a union."

"Why not? Surely the ward of Sir Thomas Wentworth, a gentleman of far higher and more ancient lineage than ours——"

"Say rather a poor dependent upon his bounty," she

interrupted sorrowfully, "a nameless orphan, perhaps of shameful birth—at least the studied silence of my protector upon the subject may well lead to such a conclusion—I should but mar your fortunes. You could not endure to see your wife rejected where you were received, and so you would hold aloof from friends and sink to my insignificance, since you could not raise me to your own estate."

"But I have no ambition," he answered; "I despise the so-called great of the world, and all the unnatural distinctions of rank and birth as heartily as though I had been born a citizen of old Rome. I shall never seek the patronage of courts. With thee, my books, and my day-dreams, my life would be so filled with happiness I should find no room for another desire, for a discontented thought. But answer me one question, Ethel, and do not let the false modesty of your sex induce you to evade the truth."

"If the question be one that I can answer, I will do so truthfully or not at all!"

"I believe you. Tell me then, were the objections you have urged removed, what answer would you make me?"

"But there—there is no likelihood——"

"No matter, remember your promise."

The warm colour mounted to her pale cheeks, but there was no false shame in the honest, truthful eyes she raised to his as she replied:

"Were I a duchess I could feel only joy and pride at being thought worthy of your choice."

"God bless you for those words," he cried fervently, and seizing her hand he pressed it rapturously to his lips. "And yet I ought to chide you for such humility, you so beautiful, so gentle; what more could a prince desire in his partner? And yet——"

He paused, and the shadow again fell upon his face, as though some unwelcome thought had suddenly entered his mind.

She raised her eyes inquiringly for a moment, but they fell as quickly beneath the strange penetrating gaze he fixed upon her. She stooped and picked up the flowers she had dropped and began to re-arrange them. He watched her silently, lost in the new thought. Not a sound broke upon his reverie, save the browsing of the horse and the lazy ripple of the leaves as some wandering breath of air swept through them.

"*Is this love?*" he muttered at last. But it was a question rather addressed to his inner consciousness than to her.

She bent over the flowers as though she had not caught the words, and perhaps she had not truly.

"We have known each other now some years, from childhood," he went on, speaking half to himself, half addressing her. "As a boy there was no place I so loved as the Wentworth woods, in their shady nooks and solitary recesses I could read my forbidden books undisturbed, and realise Spenser's enchanted forests and Shakespeare's fairy dells. I have watched the sunlit glades fancying that some Britomart or Una must presently issue from among the trees; and I have lingered in the shadows after nightfall, hoping to catch a glimpse of Titania and her fairy train in the moonlight. One summer's day it seemed as though my dreams had come to pass, and that one of the enchanted beauties of my imagination was at length revealed to my eyes. I saw a golden-haired sylph, for you seemed to me nothing less ethereal, come wandering towards me, searching in the hollows for blue-bells, of which she held a bunch in her hand. I lay motionless, concealed by a bush, fearful to move, lest this lovely vision should suddenly vanish. You plucked some flowers within my arm's length, yet never saw me, and wandered away among the trees again, unconscious of the devouring eyes that followed you."

He paused for a moment, as though gathering together a new series of images. Ethel's face bent lower and lower over the flowers as he proceeded, and her hands trembled so that she could scarcely hold them. The silence was deeper than before, for the horse had wandered away to fresh pasture, and the light breeze had fallen asleep among the hot foliage.

"You were but a child," he resumed presently, "and I was little more; but from that hour you became to me Una, Rosalind, Miranda—indeed every exquisite creation of the poet's fancy wore your shape. I saw you frequently after this, sometimes you saw me, sometimes you did not; but my presence was quite indifferent to you and never won a second glance. One day I fell in with Sir Thomas when he was hawking, and followed the sport, not because I took any interest in it, but because you were with him. He noticed me, asked one of the falconers who I was, and upon learning I was a neighbour's son, although no communication ever

passed between him and my austere father, he treated me with great courtesy. That was the commencement of our acquaintance. By-and-by he invited me to Woodhouse, and then *we* were thrown together. And I taught you to read the books I loved, and so to commune with my dreams. A glance of your eyes, a touch of your hair or fingers would thrill me with an ecstasy almost painful, but I never dared address you in words warmer than respect would warrant. You seemed so unconscious of my adoration, so far above all earthly love, that I shrank from such a thought as from a profanation. Your face was serene beneath my eyes, there was no sympathy in your touch, and so I dared not speak. But when I returned from the University I had resolved to overcome my timidity, and to learn my fate. My words seemed to reveal to you a something before undreamed of, and for a time you scarcely understood me. Then you started these scruples.—No, it is not love,” he concluded with a sigh, and like one who had come to the end of a mental analysis.

“Let us renew the old relations,” she said, looking up with pale, agitated face ; “let us forget all that has passed within these few months, and be once more as brother and sister. You shall be my dearest brother and I will be to you the most loving sister ever man had.”

In her eagerness she had again laid her trembling fingers upon his arm.

He took both her hands in his, gazed pitifully, sorrowfully into her glowing face, that so entreatingly urged this compromise, and said :

“You may as well ask me to command the burning sun above our heads to temper his heat to October mildness. Plato dreamed of such a love, and during the nearly two thousand years that have elapsed since he gave that dream to the world men and women have been trying to realise it, but never succeeding. To you, so young, so pure, so unversed in the toils of passion, it seems the most easy and natural thing in the world. No, dear one, there must be no self-deception between us. If God has decreed that our lives shall be sundered I must say perforce ‘Amen’ and bear the heavy burden of my misery as best I may. But if you cannot be my wife you can never be to me a sister.”

He let her hands fall from his clasp, and turned away his face to swallow the rising sob.

The tears started into her own eyes beneath the pathos of that tearful voice, and those desponding words, that sounded so strange to her, for she could not wholly understand their meaning.

"What can I say—what can I do?" she asked pleadingly.

"Answer me one more question," he cried, turning suddenly, and again clasping her hands and drawing her face so close to his that her breath fanned his cheek. "I have learned that your love is not like to mine, and how could I expect it to be so? What am I, that I should inspire in your heart such a love as you have lighted in mine? But I would not be exacting, I would trust to time, to the hope that my fervour would enkindle yours. Tell me then, with the same pure truthfulness as before, if these—these fancied obstacles of birth—these miserable worldly distinctions were removed, would you of your own free will become my wife?"

"Let the future shape itself," she answered in great agitation; "it is beyond our power."

"Let me speak to Sir Thomas, let me endeavour to win this secret from him."

"Not for worlds," she cried, white with consternation.

"Then ask it of him yourself, you are now at an age——"

"No, no, no," she interposed in the same agitated voice; "I could not, would not; he will tell me when it befits that I shall know it. If he is silent, he has good reason for being so, and I would not pain him by attempting to break that silence."

"Answer me then my question," he said, still holding her hands fast clasped.

She hesitated, as though seeking within for a reply. Then she raised her eyes to his and answered, "I cannot, Launcelot, for I cannot read my own heart."

"Perhaps you have seen some other, whose image stands between mine and your eyes."

"No," she answered slowly, "unless——"

A flush of colour suddenly dyed her cheeks, as she checked the rising words, and added hastily, "No, I have seen no one."

In the impulse of the moment, taking the words for far more than they meant, he caught her in his arms, and imprinted one long trembling kiss upon her lips. It was the first—never to be forgotten, but to be dreamed over, pondered over, *felt* within his inmost soul evermore.

Then he released her from his clasp; she drew back blushing and confused, and he was scarcely less startled at his own temerity.

Again there was silence between them, broken by the ecstatic song of a lark poised in mid-air above their heads; again Ethel busied herself with her flowers, and Launcelot leaned against the trunk of a great oak-tree watching her.

Suddenly a gay voice close beside them exclaimed: "Ah! truant, so I have found you at last."

Both started a little confusedly at the sight of a tall, stately-looking, and very beautiful lady.

"I hope I have not interrupted you," she added archly, looking from one to the other.

"I was passing down the road, Lady Wentworth, and looking over the gate, I saw——"

"Ethel!" she interrupted, laughing, and anticipating his word; then in a tone of the most gracious courtesy, she added, "No excuse for your presence in Woodhouse Park is needed, Mr. Franklin, you are always a welcome visitor both to myself and Sir Thomas."

"You are too good, Lady Wentworth," answered Launcelot, bowing very low over the white hand extended to him.

"I am seeking Sir Thomas, who has stolen away since dinner-time into some cool nook, to enjoy some favourite book, I expect. My young lady here followed his example, and finding myself all alone, I strolled out in quest of them. Will you accompany us in our search for Sir Thomas?"

"Pray excuse me, now, Lady Wentworth," he answered in some embarrassment. He was in no humour for conversation or society; he longed to be alone, to ponder over the scene that had just transpired. So, with a profound obeisance, he remounted and turned his horse's head towards the gate by which he had entered.

CHAPTER II.

THE BRAWL.

WHILE Launcelot Franklin is riding, deep in thought, along the hot, dusty road, whither we presently intend to follow him, we will offer the reader a few words of explanation concerning him.

He was the eldest son of Sir Richard Franklin, a gentleman of some consequence and estate in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Sir Richard, who had not been born to the inheritance, was educated to the law; and his youth, passed in London, was said to have been a wild and dissipated one. The death of his uncle, Sir Walter, without issue, unexpectedly bestowed upon him the Franklin estate. From that time a marked change came over his conduct; he became gloomy and precise in his habits, and his marriage, a short time afterwards, with a very professedly religious lady yet further increased this disposition. He seceded from the Church of England, and became a member of an Independent congregation, which he and his wife—especially the latter—had been chiefly instrumental in gathering together. This congregation was presided over by Mr. Ezekiel Blatherwick, a most potent and long-winded expounder of the Gospel.

No children were born of this marriage, Launcelot being the son of Sir Richard's first wife. Spite of the remonstrances of Mr. Blatherwick, who, priestlike, considered himself entitled to interfere in the most intimate domestic affairs, and the pious objections of Lady Franklin, both of whom

regarded all such places as abodes of Agapemone—the father had still enough respect for the usages of the world to send his son to Oxford, and there Launcelot imbibed a very great taste for what the reverend gentleman called “carnal learning.” From the time of his return from the University, which took place about a year before the opening of this narrative, he had become a subject of great inquietude to Mr. Blatherwick, through him to Lady Franklin; who in turn infected her husband, though perhaps not altogether successfully, with a like uneasiness; his religious opinions were not sound—he was lax, latitudinarian, given to the vanities of the flesh, to the pleasures of the world, to the company of the ungodly, and to the reading of the books of the heathen; such were the charges brought against him by the expounder.

From which array of wickedness the reader will, I fear, form but a poor opinion of the young gentleman’s morality. But all these charges are capable of very innocent explanations. He was lax and latitudinarian, because he did not bind himself strictly to the very severe dogmas Mr. Blatherwick propounded from his desk; the vanities and pleasures and ungodly company may be briefly summed up—he dressed like a gentleman, and not like a scarecrow, holding the belief that ugliness is not more acceptable to God than beauty; and that religion and asceticism are not synonymous; he associated with his equals, even although they did not regard a sermon of two hours’ length as the consummation of human bliss, and he loved histories and poetry, and even plays, and Plato’s philosophy better than a Puritan pamphlet.

Perhaps it was not so much what he knew as what he desired to discover that gave Mr. Blatherwick uneasiness. Launcelot was something of a mystery to him, and not to him alone, but to most who knew the youth. Outwardly he was silent, amiable, meditative, dreamy; but at times there was evidence that these appearances were but the crust covering hidden fires, fervid passions, wild enthusiasm; at times he startled alike the Puritan bigots and the most easygoing by the strangeness and novelty of his utterances; neither could comprehend him. One groaned at him as a backslider, the other shrugged his shoulders and thought him a visionary. Such bursts, however, were infrequent, and always involuntarily forced from him by some chance word or unexpected incident.

For the further evolvment of his character the reader must follow the pages of this romance ; we have only yet given the key-note.

With the reins hanging loosely on the horse's neck, and with head bent thoughtfully forward, Launcelot slowly pursued his way until he came to a comfortable-looking inn, His horse, whom he pretty well left to his own "sweet will," made towards the trough that stood in front, and while he was allaying his thirst the landlord, a portly-looking man, bustled out of the porch where he had been dozing and perspiring, and with many bows inquired if he could bring his honour any refreshment. The enjoyment of his horse reminded Launcelot that his own throat was hot and dry, so throwing the reins to mine host, he passed beneath the porch and entered a long low-ceiled room. Calling for some wine he seated himself at a small latticed window half covered with roses. It was pleasant after the glare without to sit there and let the cool sweet air laden with the perfume of roses play upon his fevered face, to listen to the droning of the bees among the flowers without, and the buzzing of a great thirsty fly as it sipped the cup-spillings upon the tables.

So dark was the room, coming into it out of the strong light, that he did not perceive the presence of a traveller at the other end, and towards whom his back was turned as he seated himself.

The stranger was a man who looked about fifty years of age, dressed in soldierly costume, that was stained with the dust and dirt of many roads. His face was shaded by a broad-brimmed hat, slouched low upon his forehead ; his dark hair was streaked with white, as was also his beard, which seemingly had not known scissors or razor for many a year. His features, burned to a Spanish brown by exposure to a foreign sun, had once been handsome, but they were now ploughed with deep hard lines, and wore a mingled expression of haughty recklessness and sombre cynicism. A goodly-sized flagon stood at his elbow, but his attitude was so still that he might have been fast asleep, nor did he make any movement upon Launcelot's entrance.

While mine host was serving his new customer and making some remarks upon the weather, he was suddenly called away by the sound of horses' hoofs halting before the house and voices loud in call.

In his shadowy niche, leaning against the wall, with folded arms and eyes bent frowningly upon the ground, sat the elder ; at the open lattice looking upon the yard, sad and thoughtful, sat the younger traveller, each buried in his own meditations.

Before the door of the inn, at which stood the host, bowing low and obsequiously, drew up two cavaliers, mounted on fiery horses, and attended by two servitors. Both were young, and dressed in the height of the prevailing fashion, which then affected the rich sombre hues of the Spanish Court. One was attired in black velvet relieved by slashings of purple silk, golden buttons, point lace, and gold-hilted rapier. The other was similarly costumed in velvet of the darkest brown. Both wore boots wrinkled almost to the ankle, and lined with point lace, which fell over the wide tops unto the instep and heel ; this was met by a frill of the same costly material attached to the bottom of the long full breeches. Black slouched hats with broad curled brims, each adorned with a long white ostrich feather drooping to the shoulder, covered their heads ; from which descended a profusion of elaborately-curved hair, and on one side a long ringlet, the love lock, which hung to the waist. One of the cavaliers was fair, handsome and ruddy, with an arrogant and aggressive expression of face, mingled, however, with an open frankness that redeemed it from viciousness. The other was dark and saturnine, with a scowling brow, and a thin, supercilious mouth, very disagreeable to look upon.

The clanking of spurs upon the brick floor roused Launcelot from his reverie ; a slight flush tinged his pale cheek as he caught sight of the new-comers, and he shifted his position a little, so as to set his back towards them. The other traveller still remained immovably ensconced in his dark corner.

As they crossed the threshold the eyes of both fell upon Launcelot ; they exchanged glances.

The lips of the dark one curled into a bitter sneer ; his companion shrugged his shoulders, smiled disdainfully, drew forth from his breast a handkerchief of gossamer lace, redolent with Italian essences, waved it over his face with a foppish air, and calling to the landlord, who stood in the doorway, said :

"Bring a flagon of your best wine, and harkye, let it be the best, as I am about to drink success to his Grace the Duke of Buckingham, confusion to his enemies and to all those who wish him ill," and he cast his eyes in the direction of Launcelot.

"For such a toast, Mr. Bellasis, you shall have the best cup of wine between this and Whitehall, or Roger Applethwaite is no loyal subject of King Charles's."

And mine host bustled away to draw the wine with his own hand.

"The Duke was to start from Portsmouth yesterday, was not he, Savile?" inquired Bellasis, turning to his companion.

"So I understand," was the reply.

"Well, may better success attend his arms this time than last, although I fear me these French Huguenots are too much like our English Puritans to deserve much pity."

"If they be like them they rather deserve hanging," answered the other with a laugh.

Launcelot still kept his eyes steadily fixed through the open window, but his lips were pressed hard to restrain their quivering, and the colour in his cheeks was deepening with every word.

From the dark corner beside the fireplace a stern visage, unmarked by any of the trio, was watching the scene with evident interest.

At that moment Roger entered with the wine.

"Success to the Duke of Buckingham, and the sword and the gallows to his enemies," cried Bellasis, raising his glass.

"And especially to all Parliament men and Puritans," added Savile.

Launcelot's hand instinctively clutched the hilt of his rapier, but instantly restraining himself, he resumed his former attitude.

Quick as the movement was it did not escape the watchful eyes of the insulters.

"Wentworth is back at Woodhouse, is not he?" demanded Bellasis, seating himself upon a corner of the table, and clanking his spurs against the legs. "I have not seen him since his sojourn in the Marshalsea."

"No; he has kept himself close since then," replied the other.

"Not only since then," interposed Bellasis, "but since he lost his post of *custos rotulorum*; that was a grand triumph for thy father and thee, John; how my Sir Thomas's proud stomach must have heaved at it; I wonder it did not choke him."

"He showed no sign of choking at Westminster; no cock of the rebellious crew—not even the Puritans—crew louder than he," rejoined Savile.

"Hang it, man, is he not half a Puritan? Has he not married a Puritan's sister? Not but it must be confessed the Lady Arabella is a most beautiful and noble lady, and Heaven forefend that I should breathe a syllable against her."

"She is not to be named with his first wife, the Lady Margaret Clifford. Naught good can come of such a stock as the Hollises," replied Savile bitterly.

Then, glancing towards Launcelot, he resumed, in a tone of insolent mockery:

"By-the-bye, hast thou ever heard who this wench, Ethel, might be, whether she is Wentworth's daughter by some light o' love, or some beggar's brat dropped at his door——"

"Silence, Savile; you go too far, you——"

But ere Bellasis could finish the sentence, Launcelot was standing before them.

"Cowardly slanderer," he cried, in a voice scarcely articulate from emotion, "take that for an answer;" and with his gloved hand he struck Savile so heavy a blow upon the face as to cause him to stagger against the wall.

"And I am for you," cried a deep voice.

Bellasis started as he saw the elder traveller, of whose presence he was unconscious until that moment, confronting him, rapier in hand.

With a cry of rage Savile drew his sword, and thrust savagely at his assailant, but the other parried the lunge and returned it with equal fierceness. Bellasis and his opponent were also hotly engaged; tables and stools were overthrown in the scuffle; the servants, who were drinking in another room, hearing the clash of swords rushed in, and ranged themselves on the side of their masters. The landlady and her maids were shrieking in the passage, whither, well out of the reach of the weapons, her spouse had betaken himself,

and where he implored "the brave gentlemen" not to kill one another.

In half-a-dozen passes the stranger inflicted so severe a cut upon Bellasis's right wrist that he compelled him to drop his sword. Almost at the same moment Savile's weapon shivered to the hilt, and Launcelot's hand was upon his throat, his rapier at his heart. But ere he could utter a word, one of the serving-men seized him from behind, and compelled him to relinquish his grip.

Savile sprang to his feet: "Stay, sir," he cried; "a tavern is no place wherein for a gentleman to defend his honour; we will find a time and place more fitting."

"It must be speedy and near, then," answered Launcelot, who had shaken off the man's hold, his eyes all ablaze with fury. "You have dared to traduce a lady in a tavern before strangers, and your slander should be punished upon the spot."

"Give me your sword, Bellasis," cried Savile.

"Hold, gentlemen," said the stranger, interposing his tall gaunt form between the combatants; "you can find a better place to finish your quarrel than this narrow, low-browed room, cumbered with stools and tables—a forest glade with the soft turf beneath your feet, and space to move your swords. And you, young gentleman," turning to Launcelot, "will be better able to defend the lady's fair fame when you are cooler; anger is a bad fencing-master."

"And who are you, fellow, that dare to thrust your presence and counsel where they are not needed?" demanded Savile haughtily.

"As good a man as you, Mr. Savile, for such I understand your name to be, and one who, had he stood in that young gentleman's position, would have struck you with his dagger instead of his hand, for he who can speak of a woman as you have, deserves a dog's death and not a gentleman's."

"Know you whom you are addressing?" demanded Savile, livid with passion.

"I should be sorry to know you better. If my words offend you, I carry your satisfaction at my side."

"Stay, sir," interposed Launcelot warmly, "this quarrel is mine, and I need no interference, nor will I brook it."

"You have the prior claim, young sir, which I am too

much of a soldier to forestall; I spoke only provisionally, in case Mr. Savile should have stomach for a second bout after you have done with him; but I shall be proud to be your second."

"With pleasure, sir, if you will tell me your name," replied Launcelot promptly.

The stranger paused before he answered. "Men know me as Godfrey Hornby; I am a soldier, and was born a gentleman; if that introduction is not sufficient I am not disposed to render any more."

"Meet me at five this evening in Graham's Wood, and we will find a spot to decide our difference," said Savile, approaching Launcelot and speaking in a low voice. Then passing towards the door he turned to Bellasis, who had fallen sullenly into the background, and who with the assistance of his serving-man was binding his wounded hand with his laced handkerchief:

"Come," he said, "let us go."

At that moment the landlady hurried in with a roll of linen and begged permission to bandage the wound; an attention he somewhat brusquely refused, although the blood was fast soaking through the flimsy wrapping he had used.

He followed his companion to the door, stopped irresolutely, then turned and addressed Launcelot:

"Mr. Franklin," said he, "I wish you to understand that I hold myself free of the words spoken by Mr. Savile, and condemn them as strongly as you can." But he added haughtily: "I tender this as no apology to you, with whom nothing would please me better than to cross swords."

"I thank you, sir, in the lady's name and my own for your candour," replied Launcelot, bowing low.

"There is something noble in that young fellow," said Hornby, as Bellasis passed out of the room, "but his companion is a dastardly hound."

"Let me thank you, sir, for so freely coming to my assistance," said Launcelot.

"I had neither deserved the name of soldier nor man had I not done so. But I have some business a little way hence. Describe the place where you are to meet this ruffler, and I will be there."

Launcelot gave the required directions, and with a wave

of his hand and a "Till we meet again," Hornby strode out of the room, called for his horse, which had been resting in the stable, and took his departure.

Launcelot immediately followed his example, amidst a long string of regrets and apologies from the landlord, which he very quickly cut short.

"Tush, tush, man, what have you to do with it? I suppose it is not the first brawl you have had in your house, nor will it be the last, unless you very speedily give up inn-keeping."

As he put his foot into the stirrup a man on horseback dashed past at a furious pace; both horse and rider were covered with foam and dust.

"Was not that Mr. Denzil Hollis?" inquired Launcelot, turning to the host.

"Yes, sir, in hot haste too, and by the look of his face I should say something serious was the matter."

When Mr. Franklin departed Roger and his wife took counsel together. As the young gentleman had remarked, brawls and bloodshed in taverns in that age of duelling were most frequent occurrences, but the awkwardness of the present affray was that it had occurred entirely between gentlemen of the neighbourhood.

"I know young Savile well," said Applethwaite; "he will have a grudge against the house as long as he lives for this morning's work, and I have taken many a bright golden piece from him in my day."

"If thou lovest one friend thou must try and find another to put in his place," answered the hostess; "and I will instruct thee how. Give them scent of this duel at Woodhouse; my lady will be grateful to thee for it, and to please her is to please Sir Thomas. Young Franklin's a favourite there. Put on thy jacket and go at once."

CHAPTER III.

SIR THOMAS WENTWORTH.

WHEN Launcelot had departed the two ladies walked slowly under the shadows of the trees in the opposite direction to that which he had taken. Ethel could read the thoughts that were passing through Lady Wentworth's mind and longed, yet knew not how, to enter upon an explanation.

The first words spoken gave her the opportunity.

"Did you meet Mr. Franklin by appointment?"

"Oh no, no," she answered earnestly; "indeed, I had no knowledge of his coming or I should have avoided the spot above all others."

"And why?" inquired Lady Wentworth, with a sly look of amusement at her intense earnestness. "I am sure the young gentleman is as handsome a cavalier as a demoiselle might waste her time with. Hath he not been making love to thee, child? Nay, never look so distressed, there is no such great crime if he has."

"You forget what I am, Lady Wentworth," answered Ethel sadly—"a nameless dependent."

"If he has dared to presume upon your position to utter dishonourable words——" began the lady, her eyes beginning to flash.

"Oh no," hastily interrupted Ethel; "Launce—Mr. Franklin is the very soul of honour. He has asked me to become his wife—but that, you know, is impossible."

"Poor child!" said Lady Wentworth, passing her arm

round the young girl's shoulder and pressing her to her side with maternal tenderness. "It is strange that my lord will never speak upon the subject. But when he desires to be silent you know we dare not press him."

"Perhaps if it were told we should wish it untold," said Ethel thoughtfully.

Lady Wentworth made no reply, and they continued their walk in meditative silence. Ascending a rising ground whence, by glancing through an avenue of tall trees, a glimpse of the house could be obtained, they took a downward path which led into a covert, or rather thickly-wooded dell.

The day was now at its hottest. All Nature drowsed beneath the excessive heat; the languid leaves drooped lazily and slept upon the trees, occasionally rousing with a dreamy shiver as the warm zephyrs stole sleepily among their shadowy masses; the birds were dozing among the coolest recesses of the foliage; all animation was suspended, and the hot stillness was broken only by the drone of the bee, that hottest and drowsiest of sounds, and the low murmur of a narrow brook, grown so weak and attenuated by long drought, that it scarcely had the strength to ripple over the moss-covered stones.

Upon a shelving bank, on the brink of the stream, over-shadowed by the wide-spreading branches of a beech, the girth of the trunk and towering height of which told of generations of growth, reclined the figure of a man. His dress, though of rich materials, was grave and sombre; but had that form been clothed in rags they could not have obscured its grandeur and nobility. Still, from the canvas of Vandyke that majestic countenance "overawes posterity" with more "than the majesty of an antique Jupiter." Around the broad haughty brow and the firmly set neck the short dark hair gathered in close crisp curls. The large eyes, now softened by the reflective mood, had a world of latent pride and fire in their dark depths; the imperious lips and broad massive jaw denoted an iron will. But the power and harshness of the face were softened by its all-pervading expression of boding melancholy—not the melancholy of thought or sorrow, but such a tragic gloom as Greek painter or sculptor might have cast upon the features of an *Œdipus*, upon a man predoomed by the gods to some terrible destiny, and

upon whom the brooding Fate had already cast her deadly shadow.

Sir Thomas Wentworth, for it was he, was at this period a man in the very prime of life, being thirty-five years of age. Although born a commoner his family was ancient and honourable, being of that untitled aristocracy from which some of the noblest gentlemen of England have sprung; and although its scions could write only plain esquire after their names, the blood of John of Gaunt, and that of some of the noblest houses in England, ran through their veins. When about twenty years of age he had married Lady Margaret Clifford, the eldest daughter of the Earl of Cumberland. Previous to this event he had been knighted by King James. As this distinction was anything rather than honourable to a gentleman in that reign, and could be bought by any person who chose to expend sufficient money, it has been a matter of surprise that so proud a man as Wentworth, who was so strongly imbued with the pride of ancient lineage, should have stooped to accept, much less to seek, this doubtful honour. The probabilities are that he was urged to it by his bride's family. On the death of his father, in 1614, he succeeded, as eldest son, to an estate of six thousand a year, an ample fortune in those days. A few months afterwards he entered Parliament. During the next year he was appointed to the post of *custos rotulorum*, or keeper of the archives of the West Riding of Yorkshire, in the place of Sir John Savile, who had given offence at Court. But Sir John, having made his peace with Buckingham, that powerful favourite wrote to Sir Thomas requesting him, *in consideration of the office having been voluntarily yielded to him*, to restore it to its original owner. Wentworth declined to accede to this demand, replying that Sir John, far from having voluntarily resigned the office, had done so only to avoid expulsion. Buckingham never forgave this refusal, and from that hour Savile was Wentworth's most bitter foe. An important event in our hero's past life was the death of his first wife, and his marriage with Lady Arabella Hollis, the daughter of the Earl of Clare, "a lady," says Wentworth's biographer, Radcliffe, "exceedingly comely and beautiful, and yet much more lovely in the endowments of her mind."

It was about this period Wentworth's public career really commenced. In the stormy Parliaments of King James's

reign he had remained a silent and passive member, supporting neither party. The position and views of Charles the First upon ascending the throne are so well known to the merest tyro in history that only the briefest mention of them will be required in this place. The first Parliament he summoned refusing to grant him supplies to carry on that war with Spain into which its predecessor had forced the late King, unless certain concessions of prerogative were given up, was speedily dissolved. But want of money soon compelled Charles to call together a second. The same men, more hostile than before, were everywhere re-elected. Their demands increased. Two of the most prominent leaders, Sir Dudley Digges and Sir John Eliot, were committed to prison. There was a second dissolution, after which the King proceeded to raise money by forced loans. It was now that Sir Thomas Wentworth, rousing from his political lethargy, ranged himself upon the popular side. Buckingham, still nursing the old grudge for the Savile business, at once marked him out as a victim of Court vengeance. He was deprived of his office of *custos rotulorum*, which was given back to its former possessor, and to render the dismissal the more humiliating it was tendered him in the open Court, while he was discharging his functions as sheriff. He was then called upon for a compulsory loan of forty pounds, which he refused to pay; and upon being summoned to London, and persisting in his refusal, he was committed to the Marshalsea prison. Similar acts of violence were perpetrated throughout the country, soldiers were billeted in the houses of the recalcitrants, many of whom were pressed into the army and navy, and sent to fight against the French at the Isle of Rhé. At the beginning of the year in which this narrative opens (1628), Charles was necessitated to again have recourse to a Parliament. Wentworth, having been released from confinement, was once more returned for Yorkshire. Smarting under a sense of his injuries, he became one of the most eloquent and passionate declaimers against the tyranny of the Court, and no member more ardently supported the Petition of Rights, then under consideration. This, after much evasion and double dealing on the King's part, at length received the royal assent. The Commons now proceeded to examine into the conduct of the Duke of Buckingham, with the view of

censuring and impeaching him. This intention very quickly procured its dissolution, which took place on June 26th, 1628.

With this brief retrospect, we will resume the thread of the narrative.

So absorbed was Wentworth in the book which lay upon the grass before him, that he was unconscious of the presence of the ladies until the elder placed her hand upon his shoulder.

The gloom disappeared from his brow as his eyes fell upon the smiling face of the fair intruder.

"Dan Chaucer seems to have been even more than usually interesting to-day," she said archly, and pointing to the book which lay upon the grass; "why, you were so absorbed that you did not hear our footsteps."

"A poor gross mortal like myself may well be pardoned for being unconscious of the presence of fairies," he answered gallantly, and lovingly raising her hand to his lips.

"Is that pretty compliment borrowed from Chaucer, my lord?" she asked, a blush stealing over her fair face; "but though it may suit Ethel here, I am afraid it is not very appropriate to me, for my proportions are not at all fairylike."

"I would not have thee other than thou art," he answered, winding his arm about her, and pressing her lovingly to his breast.

The blush deepened into a crimson glow as she leaned her head upon his shoulder and murmured: "My own dear lord, why do you steal away from me? I am jealous of every moment that robs me of thy presence, now when thou art only just restored to me. Show me what thou wast reading."

"A story I have often read before, and never tire of," he answered, "the story of patient Grisel."

"I do not like it," replied the lady quickly; "I have patience neither with her absurd meekness, nor her husband's brutality."

"I'm afraid, sweetheart, were I to put thee to such tests, you would not prove a second Grisel," said Wentworth laughingly.

"No more, my lord, than you would prove a Lord Walter. But show me the passage you were looking so sombre over."

He pointed to the page, and she read these sadly beautiful lines :

And though your greenë youthë flow'r as yet,
In creepeth age, always as still as stone,
And death menaceth every age, and smit
In each estate, for there escapeth none ;
And all so certain as we know each one
That we shall die, as uncertáin we all
Be of that day when death shall on us fall.

Lady Wentworth's eyes filled with tears, and for some moments there was silence.

It was broken by the clank of spurs, and from the direction of the house came a gentleman whose boots and dusty attire denoted a traveller.

"It is Denzil!" cried Lady Wentworth, with a look of great surprise, and running forward to meet him was the next moment clasped in the stranger's arms.

CHAPTER IV.

DENZIL HOLLIS.

THE new-comer was a young man who could not have been more than thirty years of age, but upon whose calm, handsome face was a gravity beyond his years.

"This is indeed an unexpected pleasure," said Wentworth, grasping his hand as soon as he had freed himself from the lady's embrace; "you look fatigued. Arabella, see to your brother's entertainment——"

"Time enough for that, Wentworth," interrupted Denzil quickly; "before I touch bit or sup I have news for your private ear."

The lady grew pale as she inquired, "No ill news, I trust! no new misfortune to my lord——"

"None *to him*," answered Denzil emphatically; "indeed, perhaps to him it may prove quite the contrary——"

"Thank Heaven!" she ejaculated.

"Nevertheless, my news is grave."

"Leave us, sweetheart," said Wentworth; "I perceive your brother desires private converse with me; we shall soon join you; in the meantime, see that a repast is made ready for him."

"Since the ill news is not ill to my lord, I have no care to know it," replied the lady; then turning to Ethel—who had retired a little way among the trees, she said: "Come, we will go, and prepare for their return."

Denzil raised his hat to the young girl, as she passed,

with a cold and distant politeness, to which she replied by a modest curtsy as she followed her patroness.

"Now for your news?" said Wentworth anxiously, as the ladies' forms receded among the trees.

"Prepare yourself for a great shock—the Duke of Buckingham has been assassinated."

"Great heavens!" ejaculated Wentworth. "How—when—where did this happen!"

"The reports are confused and contradictory, but as far as I can gather, he was stabbed in the streets of Portsmouth just as he was about to embark for France, by a man who had formerly been in the army under his command."

"The Duke of Buckingham assassinated," murmured Wentworth. "Can it be possible! And how did the King receive the news?"

"Strangely. He was at prayers when one of the courtiers burst suddenly into the room, and whispered it in his ear."

"The shock must have been terrible."

"Not at all—or seemingly not so. I have been told by one who was present that the King never changed countenance, never moved a muscle, but calmly continued his devotions to the end, then rose from his knees and hastily left the room without a word. One might almost imagine the news was no shock to him."

"The King is not the man to betray his feelings in public; unless we could have penetrated into the solitude of his chamber, it would be impossible to tell how he bore it."

"Now is our opportunity," said Hollis, speaking rapidly; "we must bestir ourselves without loss of time, before some new enemy gains the King's ear. I wish you to return with me to London."

"For what purpose?" inquired Wentworth absently.

"To meet Pym and the others, that we may take counsel together upon this crisis. I have proposed you for our leader."

"You have done wrong, then."

"How so? What man more fitted to be the leader of the Parliament party?"

"I am no demagogue."

"Nor I; King Charles has no more loyal subject than I, and it is my very loyalty that renders me desirous to free

him from those evil counsellors who would sway him towards despotism."

"I believe you to be a good and true man, Hollis," replied Wentworth earnestly, "desirous only to restrain the royal prerogative within those just bounds laid down by our ancestors; but I fear you are associated with men who look far beyond that goal, who cherish thoughts they dare not breathe *yet*, men who would wholly subvert the royal power. With such I will not ally myself."

"But why should you suspect such designs in any of our friends? Not from their words, surely, for who among them has spoken out more boldly than you? Might not some other, with equal justice, impute similar secret thoughts to you?"

"I grant my utterances have gone beyond my meaning; that my passionate temper has led my tongue astray, and engendered false notions in many minds; therefore it is the more my duty to correct such impressions and stand aloof from those men with whose principles I have no real sympathy, though appearing to have."

"What are we to understand from this sudden tergiversation?" demanded Hollis.

"That word in no wise applies to me, Mr. Hollis," replied Wentworth haughtily. "I am not answerable to those who misunderstand me. The man in whose veins flows the blood of the Plantagenets and the Tudors, could not be so false to his race as to desire the elevation of the common herd above those whom God has created their masters. I hold loyalty to our lawful sovereign to be the truest and noblest instinct of the human soul, all the more noble since it cannot be grasped by that reason which leads men to even doubt the existence of God. Oppressed and insulted by minions, who took the King's name in vain, I resisted their usurped authority, and asserted my own right and dignity, as the barons of old did at Runnymede. The King has granted us a second Magna Charta in the Petition of Rights, has granted all for which we contended. He has redressed our wrongs, and I for one desire no more."

Throughout his speech Hollis gazed at him with his calm penetrating eyes, which Wentworth met with his own fierce orbs in a look as steadfast.

"He redressed them under coercion," replied Hollis,

"and he will seize the first opportunity to cancel his bond. The ruling idea of Charles Stuart is to make the English monarchy absolute, and no more perilous thought could enter the brain of an English monarch."

"There is no form of government on earth so perfect as the rule of a wise, just, and good king, unshackled by the discordant councils of fools and demagogues," replied Wentworth, his eyes lighting up with enthusiasm.

"But kings are neither wise, just, nor good," answered Hollis cynically.

"And what is this Parliament which aspires to fetter the royal will and usurp the government of England?" burst forth Wentworth passionately. "Is it noble, high-souled, intellectual, unselfish? No! It is but a common cry of curs, a rabble of canting schismatics, levellers, Utopians, malcontents, innovators, urged by arrogance, greed, poverty, feverish longing for change; to yield to their desires is but to make them raven for more—no concessions could close their greedy maws."

"You seem to forget that only a few months ago you yourself were one of the loudest in this common cry of curs, as you please to call it," replied Hollis dryly.

"And were it to do again I should do it. I was wronged, insulted, oppressed, and I stood forth to champion my own injuries and those of others. I then believed I was consorting with loyal men; but I heard whispers, words, hints among them, thinking me one of themselves, that revealed to me their true designs and determined me to break with them for ever. You are indeed obtuse of perception if you cannot understand the difference between my principles and those of such men as these."

There was silence for a moment, and then Hollis spoke in a deeper and more earnest voice than he had yet assumed.

"It is you who are obtuse, not I," he said, "for you cannot read the writing upon the wall; you are blind to that new era which is dawning upon the land; great changes are near, are inevitable, which you can no more arrest than you can the transmutations of Nature. The old boundaries of law, government, and society are fast disappearing; the days of the divine right of kings, of aristocratic exclusiveness are drawing to a close; it is madness to oppose our weak bodies to the rush of the new ideas—we must suffer

ourselves to be carried on the stream or be overwhelmed beneath it."

"The Spartans who held the pass of Thermopylæ knew that the Persian host must in time overwhelm them, but they stood not the less firm, and won immortal glory. Such counsel well befits a convert to the new ideas and shows their value. These scarecrows, conjured up by your imagination, do not frighten me ; like the shadows that terrify children, they disappear before those who have courage to face them. But be it even as you say, let the flood come, I would rather bewhelmed beneath it than, like a coward, be drifted into shame and anarchy. But enough for politics, Arabella will be waiting us. You know my fixed resolve, and henceforth, as you value my friendship, let the subject be a forbidden one between us. Come."

Wentworth led the way and, with downcast eyes and sombre looks, Denzil silently followed.

CHAPTER V.

THE DUEL.

A FEW minutes' walk brought them to the avenue which fronted the house, at the end of which was a low terrace, approached by three steps, and beyond that a gravelled courtyard. The house, which had been erected by Sir Thomas's grandfather during the latter part of the preceding century, formed three sides of a quadrangle, and was built of dark brick in the prevailing Tudor style. Such picturesque old dwellings, with their gabled roofs, their stone shafted mullioned windows and porched doorways, are still too familiar to the traveller in every county of England to call for special description. Cool and peaceful it looked in its dark shadows with the bright blue sky above and the golden sunlight all around.

Lady Wentworth, who had been watching their return from one of the windows, was waiting in the entrance to receive them.

They passed through a large, lofty stone hall, lighted by long narrow windows, upon which were painted the numerous quarterings of the Wentworth shield. Against the walls hung trophies of the chase and the battle-field—ancient boarspears, antlers, bulls' horns, muskets, crossbows and longbows, battle-axes and two-handed swords which had been wielded by Crusaders. A bowing line of domestics was drawn across the hall, for Sir Thomas was punctiliously exacting in forms and ceremonies.

Ascending a broad oaken staircase with large carved balusters, which formed a square shaft from the basement to the topmost story, they entered a noble corridor and thence passed into a spacious oblong apartment, down the centre of which was a table at which a hundred people might have dined. On one side were five oriel windows, upon which were again stained the shields of the various noble families into which the Wentworths had married, and which cast bright patches of many-coloured sunlight over floor and furniture. On the other side was a huge fireplace with elaborately-carved mantelpiece; the walls were of dark oak, divided into panels carved in the shape of honeycombs, and in the centre of each was the Wentworth cypher. Ranged above was a number of stiff-looking portraits, some by Holbein, others of much earlier date, of the dead Wentworths, grim warriors in complete steel of the Plantagenet days, or beruffed and bevelveted courtiers of the Tudor Court; ladies young and old, ugly and beautiful, some in the graceful flowing dress of the Middle Ages, others in the ruff and stomacher of Elizabeth. At the farther end was an antique oak cabinet, surmounted by a beautiful Venetian mirror that reflected half the room; velvet stools and straight-backed, grim chairs, upon which had rested the bodies of more than one generation, completed the furniture.

A cloth was spread over one end of the huge table, upon which was laid the remains of a large venison pasty and an immense piece of cold beef, together with bread, oaten cakes, a black jack of potent ale, and a flagon of Burgundy. Although it was but a little past two the family dinner had been cleared some time; for in those days the dinner answered to our luncheon, although a much heavier meal, while the supper hour was scarcely as late as that of the present fashionable dinner. Beside the table stood two serving-men to carve and wait upon the guest.

"Why, fair sister," cried Denzil, laughing, "thou hast provided me with good cheer and waiters enough to feed half-a-dozen aldermen."

"We are old-fashioned people at Woodhouse, Wentworth, and follow ancestral customs," answered Sir Thomas, a little stiffly; "your London luncheons and meagre dishes would not satisfy our Yorkshire stomachs, neither would your free manners, which scarcely distinguish the gentleman from the

laquey. The honour we expect in our own persons we bestow upon our guests."

"Nay, nay, good brother," replied Denzil, good-humouredly, "I meant not to fling at your board or your ceremony, I spoke but thoughtlessly; I am no admirer of kickshaws, and I love orderliness in my household. And I have an appetite besides that will do justice to your entertainment."

And he set to work upon the viands before him with a hearty goodwill that showed he spoke truly.

Throwing his arm round her waist Wentworth led his wife into the recesses of one of the windows.

"Sweetheart," he said, smiling lovingly upon her, "I know by the curious look upon thy face thou art longing to know thy brother's errand."

"Indeed, my lord——" she began, depreciatingly.

"Tut, tut, never deny it—it is but natural. His news is grave. Like the shock of an earthquake it is vibrating through the whole land, it will change the policy of nations, it may bring much good, or it may be productive of great evils, no one can tell yet. I see by thy pale face I must not keep you longer in suspense, your brother has come hither then to warn me of a tragic event—the Duke of Buckingham has been assassinated."

"Great heavens, how terrible!" she ejaculated. But the next moment she added in the tone of one uttering an involuntary thought, "He was your bitterest enemy."

"And therefore deserved his fate, you think," said Wentworth, smiling. "Nay, nay, I was only jesting," he added, interrupting her remonstrance. "But nevertheless there spake the true woman, whose first thoughts are ever for husband, children, kin; states may be shaken, kingdoms overturned so that they be safe."

"And dost thou think that to be a fault in us?"

"I fear I do not in my heart," he replied, playing with the curls upon her forehead; "I must even confess that I prefer a loving to a patriot wife."

At that moment a serving-man entered the apartment, and advancing within a few paces of his master, made an obeisance and stood waiting to be asked his errand.

"Speak, what is it?" inquired his master, turning to him.

"If you please, Sir Thomas, Roger Applethwaite is below and wishes to see her ladyship."

"To see me! Art sure it is not Sir Thomas?"

"Quite sure, my lady, I put the question to him."

"I will go and see him," said Wentworth.

"No, no, my lord, let me go, it is doubtless to ask me to intercede with you for some favour; the poor fellow will be out of countenance if you go."

"Well, well, have thy way, thou art a good creature."

In a few moments she returned looking very much agitated.

"What is the matter?" he asked, quickly.

"Oh, my lord, John Savile and Mr. Franklin are about to fight a duel."

"Well, is it so very unusual for two hot-blooded young men to cross swords that you should be thus alarmed?"

"But it is on account of our Ethel."

"What do you mean; explain?" he cried, his brow darkening.

"Savile spoke some opprobrious words against her. Franklin struck him in the face, and they fought in Applethwaite's room; one of the swords was broken, and then an assignation was made for five this evening, somewhere near Graham's farm. We must prevent this meeting, or there will be bloodshed."

"So not content with wreaking their malice upon me, these Saviles must cast shameful words upon the women of my household," he muttered through his clenched teeth. "Let them beware they goad me not too far, or they may as well have all the devils in hell let loose upon them."

"Will you not try to prevent this meeting, my lord?" she inquired timidly, for even she feared him when his passions were roused.

"No; let Franklin kill the viper! kill him, kill him!"

His eyes were all ablaze now, and he emphasised the word "kill" by fiercely striking the hilt of his sword with his hand as though he were driving the weapon through the body of his foe.

"What is the matter, brother?" asked Denzil, joining them. "Are they equally matched?" he inquired, when his sister had answered his question.

"If there be an advantage, it is upon the side of

Franklin," replied Wentworth, striding up and down. "I would I had been there, I would have crammed my sword down his foul throat."

"If the springalds be well matched, let them be," said Denzil, carelessly.

"But think of the scandal—Ethel's name——" urged the lady.

"I should imagine the young lady ought to feel herself honoured to be the subject of such an encounter," interposed Denzil, roughly; "better demoiselles than she have been treated with as little ceremony by scandalous tongues."

"I know not that," replied Wentworth, haughtily; "as my ward, she owns no better."

"It must be admitted that that is a point upon which you alone are informed," replied Denzil, significantly.

"And my knowledge is a sufficient guarantee for my word," was the answer.

"My lord—Denzil be not angry," interposed Lady Wentworth, anxiously. "At such a time as this we should not think of ourselves but of the brave youth who is about to risk his life for the honour of our house."

"You are right, Arabella," answered Wentworth, with a sudden change of tone; "the quarrel is mine, it would ill become me to permit a stranger to peril his life for the fair name of one who is beneath my protection, and I stand idly by."

And he made a movement to depart. Lady Wentworth grew paler and clasped his arm.

"There is no necessity for you to go, Denzil will go; you know how hot-blooded you are, your quarrels with these Saviles have brought troubles and anxiety enough upon us already."

"Go thy ways, child; attend to thy household duties and leave such business as this to your husband, who understands it better," answered Wentworth, with a touch of sternness in his tone.

She unloosed her hold, for she knew it was useless to oppose that relentless will.

"I will go with him, Arabella," said Denzil, readily.

"I leave him in your hands, brother," said Lady Wentworth, holding him back for a moment; "restrain his rashness, do not let him plunge into this quarrel."

"I will do my best for your sake, sister, but you know his selfwill."

When the two gentlemen had departed the lady was joined by a face white and anxious as her own. It was Ethel's; her waiting-woman had just brought her the news.

"We must prevent this meeting," she said, in great excitement; "were aught of evil to fall upon Sir Thomas, I should eternally reproach myself as the cause."

"What can we do?"

"Follow them to the spot; they cannot fight in our presence."

"But my lord would never forgive me such an act."

"You shall not go, I will go alone—let his anger fall upon me."

Lady Wentworth regarded her in amazement; this girl ever so gentle, so shrinking from all notice, was suddenly roused to a courage and resolution she feared to imitate.

"You are right, Ethel, we will go," she said, after a little consideration; "I must brave his anger when his safety is concerned."

Graham's Wood was a straggling piece of copse skirting a narrow lane, and about two miles from Woodhouse. The gentlemen's horses soon carried them thither, and as they entered the lane the clash of swords told them the combat had already commenced. Darting through the trees, followed by Hollis, Wentworth came to a clearing where four men, whose horses were tied to the neighbouring trees, were engaged in cut and thrust, and so swiftly did their swords gleam in the sunlight that they seemed flashes of lightning. But before the combatants could be conscious of the interruption, the duel of one of the two pairs was brought to an end. The ground was rough and uneven, and here and there straggling root fibres rose out of the parched shallow soil; in parrying a lunge, Launcelot's foot struck against one of these obstructions—he stumbled, missed his guard and the next instant his adversary's sword was passed through his body. But Savile had thrust with such savage eagerness as to leave his own person unguarded, and, in consequence, almost ran upon his opponent's point, which pierced the fleshy part of his neck. Thus both were placed *hors de combat* at the same moment.

The two seconds perceiving this state of affairs, dis-

engaged, and each ran to his principal. As the man who styled himself Godfrey Hornby knelt on one side of Launcelot, Wentworth stooped over him on the other. Their eyes met.

Hornby started back, for in the excitement he had been, until then, unconscious of another presence. But the momentary surprise was as instantly succeeded by another expression—recognition.

“You here!” exclaimed Wentworth.

“Yes, to seek you. But suppress your amazement, feign not to know me—we will find an opportunity to speak hereafter.”

Hornby spoke in a low, rapid voice, while bending his head low over the prostrate body, and was unheard by any one, save the person whom he addressed.

Launcelot had fainted, and the blood was flowing fast from a wound in his side. Hornby tore open his doublet and examined the hurt with the eye of a man well used to such sights.

“It has not penetrated a vital part,” he said, “but it is an ugly thrust, and it will be many a week before he can handle a sword again. But we must stop the hæmorrhage, or he’ll bleed to death.”

“I will go and fetch assistance,” cried Hollis.

While he galloped away Wentworth and Hornby employed themselves, by means of handkerchiefs and bandages torn from their linen, to stanch the life-stream that was so rapidly ebbing away from Launcelot’s bosom.

While thus engaged they heard a voice say, “Here they are, my lady.”

And as Wentworth raised his head his eyes fell upon Ethel and his wife. The younger lady pressed forward and uttered a cry of terror as she saw the senseless body lying in a pool of blood.

“Oh God, he is killed!”

“No, he has only fainted,” replied Wentworth.

“But why are you here—this is most unseemly, most——”

Here Ethel interrupted his stern tones, which were addressed to Lady Wentworth.

“I alone am to be blamed—it is my wilfulness——”

Her voice failed her, and she would have fallen to the

ground had not Hornby, who observed her stagger, sprung up and caught her in his arms. A strange expression stole over his rough features as he gazed upon the beautiful pale face that rested upwards upon his shoulder, and so absorbed did he become in its contemplation that he started when one of Wentworth's serving-men came forward to relieve him of his burden, and his eyes followed her with a long, lingering yet troubled look as she was transferred to the care of her protectress.

In the meantime Wentworth had advanced towards Savile, who was reclining against a bank, whither Bellasis had contrived to bear him and bandage his wound.

"Had it been my sword, John Savile, instead of Mr. Franklin's, you would have been a dead man by this time," said Wentworth, standing over him, his dark face full of hatred. "But I am glad that it is as it is, it may reserve your punishment for me."

"You see that Mr. Savile is unable to speak," cried Bellasis, firing up, "but I will answer for him that he will be ready to respond to your challenge as soon as he has the strength to do so. Or if you crave for haste I am ready to be his substitute."

Wentworth deigned no reply, but turned upon his heel with a look of withering contempt.

"I must speak with you to-night and alone," said Hornby in his ear.

"Be in the park avenue at nine, then," replied Wentworth in the same tone.

Hornby made a sign of assent, mounted his horse, and disappeared among the trees.

Soon afterwards Hollis returned with four country fellows, whom he had found working in a field. A litter of branches was constructed, upon which Launcelot was laid, still insensible, and borne towards Woodhouse.

CHAPTER VI.

SUMMONED BY THE KING.

At her husband's request Lady Wentworth, accompanied by Ethel and the serving-man, went on in advance to prepare for the reception of the patient, who was to be conveyed to Woodhouse, as being much nearer than his own home. It was a long and tedious task carrying the wounded man on that rude litter over the rough roads and the uneven undulating park ground. Once a heavy jolt caused the wound to re-open, and they had to halt to rebind it.

The blue of the sky had turned to purple, and the golden sunlight to crimson by the time they arrived at the house. The young man, still insensible, was conveyed to bed, his wounds were now carefully dressed, and without any medical aid, for in those days sword cuts and thrusts were such common ills that most people, especially ladies, knew how to treat them as well as an army surgeon nowadays.

This being done, a messenger was despatched to Sir Richard Franklin to inform him of the accident that had befallen his son, and to allay his natural apprehensions as far as possible by assurances that he was in no danger and would be well tended.

When the messenger returned he was accompanied by Sir Richard. There was little sociability between the two neighbours. Wentworth was a stanch Churchman, the other, as we have before stated, a rigid Puritan, differences

quite sufficient to render them foes. In neither person, however, had feelings risen to positive enmity, although Mr. Blatherwick had once referred in unmistakable terms to the owner of Woodhouse as an enemy of Israel, and had denounced the intimacy between Launcelot and the Wentworths as a consorting with the children of Baal!

The meeting between visitor and host was cold and ceremonious. By the time of the former's arrival Launcelot had recovered consciousness, but was too weak from excessive loss of blood to speak. A faint smile of recognition crossed his face as his eyes fell upon his father's cold, harsh features, in which sour asceticism had crushed all human feeling, and he tried to lift his hand, but was incapable of such exertion.

"How did this happen?" inquired Sir Richard of Hollis, who was standing beside the bed.

"There has been a duel between him and young Savile, both are severely wounded, your son the worst of the two; but do not be uneasy, the sword has not touched any vital part, and his excessive prostration is due to hæmorrhage."

"Were you present?"

"I and Sir Thomas came up in time to see both fall."

"And you made no attempt to prevent this barbarous and unchristian act?"

"There you mistake," replied Hollis; "both myself and my good brother here went to prevent this meeting."

"And what was the cause of quarrel?"

Denzil hesitated and turned to Wentworth for a reply.

"Mr. John Savile chose to use foul and disparaging language against my ward in your son's presence, and he took upon himself to resent it," answered Wentworth, haughtily.

"Worse and worse," muttered Sir Richard. "It is a shame and sorrow to my gray hairs to know that a son of mine should be a brawler, with his hand upon his sword for every light word."

"And yet I have heard, Sir Richard," interposed Hollis, brusquely, "that you yourself were something of a ruffler once, ready to fight for any wench, light or otherwise, who wanted a champion."

The Puritan's cadaverous face turned green.

"Then you have heard what is not true, Mr. Hollis," he

answered. "Truly, I did not always walk in the ways of the Lord, and I have kept company with sinful men ; but I was never a fornicator nor a stabber. Neither, with the help of the Lord, shall my son be so. Therefore it behoves me to remove him from evil associates. To-morrow morning early I will have Launcelot brought home, and I must request, Sir Thomas Wentworth, that for the future he may be a stranger to this house. Your ways are not my ways, our paths in life are different."

Wentworth replied, calmly : "Your desires shall be obeyed to the letter, Sir Richard Franklin, and the first of your name, be it he or any other, who crosses this threshold shall be expelled by my serving-men. And let me tell you that your son was guilty of an insolent presumption in taking upon himself the chastisement of the traducer of my ward, and one for which I may yet call him to strict account. When the Wentworths cannot champion their own honour they will find someone nobler than a Franklin to take up their cause."

Sir Richard's gleaming eyes told how well these bitter words had struck home, and by an uncontrollable movement his hand grasped the hilt of his sword, but it was as quickly withdrawn, while his lips murmured, "The Lord forgive me ;" and, as though fearful of trusting himself to further speech, he abruptly quitted the chamber and descended the stairs.

As he reached the hall, which was lit by torches, Ethel crossed in front of him. His eyes fell upon her face and he stood for a moment watching her as she disappeared, through a doorway.

"Who is that ?" he asked of one of the domestics.

"That is Mistress Ethel, Sir Thomas's ward," replied the man.

The Puritan made no remark, but passed out into the courtyard with a pale, thoughtful visage.

"It seems to me as though the tones of that man's voice were familiar to me," said Wentworth, meditatively. "I have seen his face frequently since he first came into the neighbourhood, but I have never before, to my knowledge, heard him speak. And yet his tones struck upon my ears like an old memory."

"I have heard some strange story about this Sir Richard

Franklin, but I cannot recall it to my mind," answered Hollis.

And there the subject dropped.

Fortunately for the sick man this interview had taken place not in his apartment, but in an ante-chamber beyond, where in his half-comatose condition he could hear nothing of what passed.

Lady Wentworth was both grieved and indignant when she heard of Sir Richard's insolence ; grieved for the sake of Launcelot, for whom she entertained a very warm friendship, and for Ethel, whom she believed to be in love with him ; and her proud blood was equally indignant at the insult which had been cast upon the house.

That same evening she told the young girl, as gently as she could, what had passed.

"I feel for you deeply, my poor child," said the kind lady, caressing her ; "ay, both for you and for him. Your little romance is over, close the book and try to forget it, for after what has passed Sir Thomas will be inexorable."

"I shall never disobey Sir Thomas, even in thought," answered Ethel.

"Bless you, my sweet child, for those words," cried Lady Wentworth, kissing her affectionately ; "but I can feel what your obedience will cost you : if in our sweetheart days aught had happened to separate me from my lord, I should have died. But to confess my weakness is not the way to strengthen your heart. You must be braver than I. And then, handsome and good and clever as he is, Launcelot is not my lord. But where, in all England, is there another so grand, so noble, so handsome ?"

Ethel made no reply, she had sunk down upon a footstool and was lying back with her head upon the speaker's lap, gazing upwards through the open casement upon the purple night, moonless, but brilliant with stars ; soundless, but for the dreamy sough of the leaves as they stirred in the soft summer air.

"Poor Launcelot !" she murmured presently, rather to herself than to her companion. "It is not of myself I think, but of him, he loves me so very, very dearly."

And Lady Wentworth, whose hand was fondling her head, felt a tear trickling down her cheek.

The next morning, soon after sunrise, a litter conveyed

Launcelot from Woodhouse to his own home. He had greatly revived during the night, but his removal was a most dangerous experiment, as the re-opening of his wound might have proved fatal. Fortunately he was conveyed to the paternal roof without any such unfortunate accident, but sorely troubled in mind.

Wentworth did not see him after the interview with Sir Richard, but he instructed the attendant, who waited in the sick chamber, to inform her patient that *by his father's desire* he would be removed to his home on the next day. Launcelot, although he had heard nothing, could surmise something of what had passed, and knew that another link was broken between him and Ethel.

Denzil Hollis departed for London that same morning, and the leave-taking between him and Wentworth was cold and formal.

An uneventful week succeeded twenty-four hours fruitful in wonderful news and excitement. The ladies contrived to get bulletins which assured them that Launcelot was progressing favourably ; but they dared not speak of him in the presence of Sir Thomas, whose mood was unusually sombre and severe. Little time did he pass within doors, and that little was in restlessness and irritability. He spent the greater part of the day wandering in the woods with a book in his pocket, which he seldom opened, or in lying listlessly beneath the shadows. His soul, born for action, for the fiercest battles of life, was consuming itself in this idleness.

But one day there came a letter that quickened all his pulses. It was a mandate from the King requesting his presence at Whitehall. Royal missives had brought so much evil and so little good to Woodhouse-Wentworth, that this one filled Lady Wentworth with alarm ; she feared some new machinations of her husband's enemies ; of Savile, whom she knew would eagerly seek for an opportunity to be revenged for his late discomfiture.

"Fear nothing, sweetheart," said Wentworth, who was all excitement and expectancy. Now that Buckingham is gone, his Majesty's own nature, which is gentle and benign, will assert itself. Mark how gracious and condescending is the tone of his letter. There is the memory of the old time in it. He loved me well once. When I first went to Court, in his father's time, during the life of Prince Henry, we were

much together from similarity of tastes ; he loved reading, poetry, painting, and all elegant arts, and so did I. We were much of an age, and something alike in temperament as well as tastes, except that he was more gentle, more winning than I was. Indeed, I never met one who possessed such a marvellous and subtle power of attraction as he. When he chose to exert it he could subdue the most stubborn and unloving. I remember well how powerful was its effect upon me. It was like a glamour ; I was the very slave of my love for him. But by-and-by Buckingham, who could endure no rival in the Prince's favours, came between us and alienated his heart from me. In our wrath we are always most bitter against those we love, and so it was with me. But all that will be healed now ; I can read between the lines of this letter what is invisible to you."

Ere he went he succeeded in imparting to his wife something of his own hopefulness ; but still her loving heart was uneasy, and she implored him, as soon as his interview with the King was over, to despatch a messenger to Woodhouse with the result.

He promised, and so with some half-dozen attendants went on his way to London.

Book II.—At Court.

CHAPTER I.

THE KING.

It was about noon on the third day of his journey that Wentworth entered the city of Westminster. Even then the Strand was a bustling thoroughfare. Lacqueys in gorgeous liveries, splendidly-dressed cavaliers on prancing steeds, gilded equipages, sedan-chairs bearing gorgeously-attired ladies ; sober hackney-coaches, then first introduced, with their freights of gaily-dressed citizens, formed a constantly moving panorama, and a scene of almost bewildering excitement to a country dweller fresh from the quietude of trees and flocks.

As he passed the ancient cross of Charing and came in sight of Holbein's beautiful gateway, which formed the northern entrance to the Palace at Whitehall, the throng both of people, horses, and equipages greatly increased. Here loitered a group of gentlemen, attired in that picturesque costume which we still admire on the canvas of Vandyke—the broad-leafed hat with its drooping plumes, the long curled hair, the point-lace collar, and the rich velvet doublet ; the sweeping cloak hanging from one shoulder and negligently gathered beneath the left arm ; the lace-and-ribbon-bordered breeches drawn tight to the knee ; the silken hose and velvet shoe, or boot of morocco wrinkled down to show the costly lace that lined the "bucket" tops. Pages gay as popinjays

hurried hither and thither ; ladies in rustling silks and soft laces, just alighting from their carriages or sedans, darting demure looks from beneath their silken hoods at the staring gallants ; couriers on horseback dashing in and out at furious speed, endangering the limbs of pedestrians ; and there were besides domestics, soldiers, humble petitioners, artists, men of law, and all the swarm that hovered round the ancient Court.

The palace was a large pile of irregular buildings, extending from Scotland Yard almost to the Abbey ; bounded on the east by the river, and on the west by a narrow thoroughfare leading from Charing Cross to the Sanctuary at Westminster, the southern end of which was called, as now, King Street ; across this extended another handsome gateway, which was the southern entrance to the Palace. The ground now occupied by the Admiralty, the Horse Guards, and the Foreign Offices, was covered by a Tilt Yard and Tennis Court, beyond which was an enclosure, now St. James's Park.

Passing beneath the Holbein gateway Wentworth entered a broad courtyard. On his left stood that splendid fragment of a grand design, which would, if completed, have eclipsed Louvre and Escorial and given a glory to London it can never now possess—the banqueting-hall of Inigo Jones, then in its first freshness, having been built scarcely ten years ; and on the other sides the various offices and buildings which made up the Palace.

The veriest stranger would have needed no guide to the royal quarters, which were easily distinguished by the groups and loiterers that hung about them, and the numbers of people hurrying in and out.

Giving his horse to one of his attendants he entered, and passed into a crowded ante-chamber, where nobles, artists, antiquaries, authors, architects, soldiers, artificers jostled each other, and evidenced the various and cultivated tastes of the King.

From the foremost position he had held in the late Parliament, Wentworth had rendered himself a man of note both in town and country, and he had also been a frequenter of Whitehall during the last reign ; thus he was well known to the courtiers, but not favourably, on account of his opposition to the Court and his adherence to the popular cause. His entrance into the ante-chamber attracted considerable atten-

tion; the buzz of conversation almost ceased, every eye was turned upon him; then followed whispered speculations upon his probable business; some suggested that he had come to humble himself to the King; others, that he had been summoned to answer for some new offence against prerogative; but no one dreamed of the true cause.

Wentworth, perfectly unembarrassed by the sensation he had created, glanced round at the whisperers; many faces were familiar to him as old acquaintances—these shifted uneasily, gave a slight sign of recognition, or pretended to be utterly unconscious of his presence; others frowned, and nowhere did a friendly expression meet his eye; but upon all alike did he cast the same look of cold disdain as he sat down to await the return of the usher, whom he had desired to announce his arrival to the King.

Presently there entered from the court-yard a gentleman about thirty years of age, with dark, curling hair waving naturally to the nape of his neck, a smoothly-shaven face, remarkably pleasant in expression, and large, bright, penetrating eyes full of fire and genius. Every person in the room had a cordial greeting for him; the artists and artificers were respectful, the courtiers familiar, but the manner of all betokened he was a person of some consequence. As, with a rapid step and smiles, bows and nods, he was passing on to the door which led to the royal apartments, he paused suddenly—his quick glance had caught a new face.

“Sir Thomas Wentworth!” he exclaimed, speaking with a foreign accent, and advancing with outstretched hand, “this is indeed an unexpected pleasure.”

“What, my old friend Anthony Vandyke!” answered Wentworth, warmly grasping the proffered hand.

At that moment the usher returned, and requested Sir Thomas to follow him. Vandyke, who was also seeking the royal presence, accompanied him through the long dimly-lit corridor, at the end of which was a second ante-chamber, in which waited another but more select group, although similar in its elements to that just described.

At the farther extremity of this apartment was an archway, from which hung heavy curtains of purple velvet opening in the centre, and which were raised by two splendidly-dressed pages, as people continually passed in and out.

At the entrance of Vandyke, who again exchanged nods,

smiles, and bows with nearly all present, the draperies were instantly drawn aside, and the next moment he and his companion, whose every pulse beat fast with nervous excitement, stood in the royal presence.

The apartment was deficient in grandeur of proportion, but the artistic magnificence of its decorations and furniture more than compensated for its lack of loftiness and its small mullioned windows, which admitted the daylight but sparingly. The walls were hung, like the doorway, with purple velvet draperies, upon which were embroidered in gold the royal cypher and the arms of England and France; the chairs and seats were to match; there were exquisitely-carved cabinets of ivory and ebony, inlaid with gold and precious stones; between one of the windows was a Roman shield of buff leather, covered with a golden plate, upon which was the head of a Gorgon, made of the same costly material, and the rim of the shield was encrusted with precious stones; upon the walls, where the hangings were drawn aside, were some masterpieces of Titian and Tintoretto; and scattered upon tables and cabinets were miniatures set in jewels, silver statuettes, marble busts, golden cups exquisitely chased, bearing in alto-relievo mythological stories from the Latin poets, the figures of the gods and goddesses being cut out of rubies and amethysts and other precious stones; and this splendour was multiplied again and again in the large Venetian mirrors cunningly disposed in various parts of the chamber.

In the background were grouped several officers of the household, and at a table in the centre of the apartment, conversing with three gentlemen, was the King himself.

There is probably no character of English history whose appearance is so familiar to us as that of the unhappy Charles Stuart; while the canvas of Vandyke endures those refined and melancholy features, upon which Fate had cast its darkest shadow, will live for us and our posterity. To attempt any description of what is in the mind's eye of all would be impertinent as well as superfluous. He was engaged in examining a bust of himself, which had been executed by Bernini and just forwarded from Rome. He raised his eyes at the entrance of the new-comers, and perceiving Sir Thomas, advanced with an air of the most graceful condescension to receive him.

“ Sir Thomas Wentworth, you are welcome once more to

Whitehall," he said, holding out his hand, speaking in that low, soft voice he knew so well how to modulate to the occasion, and regarding him with that sweet, melancholy smile, which went direct to the heart of every beholder. "You have been absent too long," he continued, "but more of that anon," checking all reply. "What do you think of this bust, which the great Bernini has just executed for me? There is the copy sent him by our good friend, Anthony Vandyke," and he pointed to a picture standing against a chair, which was no other than the celebrated triple portrait, full, half, and three-quarter face, now at Windsor.

"I do not know which to admire most, the bust or the picture, both are super-excellent," replied Wentworth, after a moment's examination.

The three gentlemen, all artists, one of whom was the celebrated Dutch painter, Gerbier, formerly in the service of Buckingham, and who had just been knighted, were also loud in their praises of both performances.

The king, more judicious in his judgment, pointed out where improvements might have been effected, and by the keenness and delicacy of his criticism proved himself to be what he really was—the finest and most *spirituel* connoisseur of his time.

After this there were admitted several collectors, whom the king kept constantly employed in gathering for him those works of art from all parts of Europe, which were scattered again under the Commonwealth, to the irreparable loss of the nation. There were also mathematicians and mechanics, who brought curious pieces of workmanship for sale. With all these, and there were French, Spanish, and Italian among them, he conversed in their native tongues, and whatever were the objects they brought for his inspection, whether pictures, coins, antique marbles, clocks, watches, he showed himself well acquainted with the nature of all.

At length all were dismissed, with the exception of two pages, who removed to such a distance as not to intrude upon the royal privacy, and the King and Wentworth were alone.

CHAPTER II

HENRIETTA MARIA.

As the curtains closed behind them, the animation which had lit up the King's face was clouded by an expression of sombre melancholy.

"We have just half an hour before the council meets," he said, glancing at his watch. Then added, with a sigh, "But for such relaxations as these"—waving his hand towards the art treasures that were scattered about—"I do not think I could endure the strain, the struggle, the turmoil of State affairs. How I miss Buckingham; it seems that there remains to me no loyal servant now Buckingham is gone; he alone had the courage to draw upon himself the storm of hatred which would have fallen upon me. He had faults, and many; but I can find no one to supply his place."

"One word of encouragement would bring to your side hundreds of loyal gentlemen ready to devote fortune and life to your service," replied Wentworth, warmly.

"It is not for the Sovereign to solicit, but for the subject to proffer," replied Charles.

"I do not speak of solicitation; the encouragement I might advise, did I dare, is of another kind."

He paused in some embarrassment, not knowing how to proceed.

"I think I catch your meaning," said the King, with a touch of sarcasm in his tone. "You would have me submit

to the demands of my *faithful* Commons—discrown myself, and take for regent Pym or Hollis, or some other of their kind. That will I never do. God hath elected me his vicegerent over this kingdom, and in defiance of the wicked machinations of rebels I will be faithful to that trust, even though it should bring upon me the fate of my unhappy grandmother, and lay my head upon the block.”

And he struck his hand excitedly upon the table ; in doing so, it fell so heavily upon the edge of a small antique dagger, which lay there among other curiosities, as to inflict a wound.

As he raised his hand very quickly, some blood spurted upon Bernini's bust, making a crimson splash across the back of the neck. No man of that age, however cultivated his mind, was proof against superstition—above all, the superstition of omens. There was something so startling in this seeming answer to his defiance, that Wentworth, who was himself greatly moved, observed the King's face blanch.

The pages were about to hurry away for a surgeon when Charles stopped them :

“It is nothing,” he said, recovering himself, and binding his lace handkerchief round the wound.

“I would govern only as my ancestors have governed,” he went on, as though he had not been interrupted, “as the Henrys and Edwards, the Plantagenets and Tudors, as Elizabeth herself, whose name is one of glory on every English lip, and yet she committed acts which might well be branded as tyranny. I would govern as my brother sovereigns rule—as France and Spain rule. Look abroad and you will see the sovereign power rising every day absolute and uncontrolled out of the rude chaos of feudalism ; and shall I alone be blind to God's finger, which directs the destiny of kings ; shall I alone of his anointed turn coward because his enemies and mine show a menacing front ? What the great Henry began in France, and Louis and his minister, Richelieu, are completing, what Charles and Philip have accomplished in Germany and Spain, I will do in England.”

He pronounced this speech, walking excitedly up and down the apartment, with trembling lips and flashing eyes. Yet it was not the exaggeration of mere passion, but the utterance of an intense conviction. Not only did Charles proclaim the doctrine of divine right, but he believed it with

all his soul, and died a martyr, to use the word in its primary sense—a *witness* to his faith.

“And you, Wentworth,” he went on, after a pause, “you whom we have loved, you who can even claim kindred with ourselves, have joined these rebels in their clamour against their lawful King; it is an evil day for the land when men such as you are forgetful of those ties and duties which bind them to the throne. Oh, fie!”

There was a tone of mournful reproach, but little anger in the King’s voice as he uttered these words, which would have melted the sternest heart; how profound then must have been its effect upon one which already yearned towards him, and Wentworth’s tones trembled as he replied:

“Sire, you do me wrong, and yet I well deserve your reproach. Not against you have I joined the clamourers, for I call God to witness my heart has never known aught but love to your person, and devoted loyalty to your crown; but against those evil counsellors, the odium of whose crimes has been cast upon you. Even before I received your summons, I had resolved to break with these men, and told them as much. It is humiliating to confess that private injuries should make me false to myself, but so it was. Once you called me friend—pardon the presumption of the word, but it was your own. Such an honour was to me the dearest treasure of my life, and when you withdrew it, I not knowing why, unless it might have been my native unworthiness of such a boon, my heart was full of bitterness; I need not recall what followed, the exaltation of my enemy, Sir John Savile, my public degradation in the open Court, and for no fault of which I had the least knowledge. Such injuries were all the more bitter to me knowing my heart to be full of loyal love, and I treated like a traitor. But this, sire, was not your work——”

“No more,” interrupted the King hastily; “I know what you would say, but do not let us speak of him; he has gone to his account; I loved him well; may God assoilise him. My poor Wentworth, you have been wrongfully used, but your Sovereign asks your pardon, and will endeavour in the future to compensate you for the faults of the past.”

“Oh sire, do not stoop to ask pardon of me; am I not your subject, and as such bound to submit to your will,

whatever it may be? But justice is a portion of a king's prerogative, and when evil counsellors violate that prerogative in his name it is but the duty of loyal men to bring their grievances before him, at least so I construe it."

A slight shadow of vexation crossed the King's face during the latter part of this speech, which pleased him less than the commencement.

But the conversation was here interrupted. The hangings behind the King, raised by invisible hands, disclosed a door and two pages, one standing on each side of it. There was a rustling of silk and velvet, and then a lady with very dark eyes, and a vivacity of expression which lent beauty to a countenance that would otherwise have been scarcely pretty, entered the room.

It was the Queen.

"I thought you were alone, sir," she said, addressing the King in French.

Wentworth, after making a profound reverence, stepped back to the farther extremity of the room, so as to permit the royal pair to converse.

Henrietta Maria drew Charles towards the window.

"Who is that?" she inquired, still speaking in her native tongue, and casting a glance over her shoulder.

"It is Sir Thomas Wentworth," replied the King, with a little hesitation.

"What, the parlementaire—the man that was put in prison?"

"The same."

"What does he here? Has he come to humble himself—to crave pardon on his knees for his rebellious insolence?"

"Hush, sweetheart, you are mistaken. Sir Thomas was led away by factious men, but he has broken with them—in our youthful days we were friends."

"I do not like him, I do not like his face," she said, casting rapid glances towards Wentworth. "I should never like him. He is ugly. But," she added, after another glance, "he has very beautiful hands."

"Nevertheless he is a man of powerful mind, of acute and very highly-cultivated intelligence," responded the King, lowering his voice; "a dangerous foe, a firm friend, one of the few men upon whose devotion I could fully depend

—there are few such about Court. The very man of whom we stand in need at this moment.”

“I do not like this temporising with traitors,” answered the Queen impatiently. “You are too lenient, too neglectful of your royal authority.”

“My subjects complain that I overstep it,” responded Charles, with one of his melancholy smiles. “Which is right?”

“Your subjects are traitors, I hate them all.”

“Hush, dearest, walls have ears,” interrupted the King uneasily, “you must not speak thus.”

“But I have come to talk to you of the new masque,” she resumed suddenly, changing her tone to one of eager vivacity.

“By-and-by I will come to you in your closet and we will speak of it, but the council is waiting me now,” and he led her towards the door by which she had entered.

“Thus it is always,” she answered poutingly, “you are lavish of your society to all save me: your painters, your nobles, your very servants would seem to have a prior claim to your Queen. Let these men wait your pleasure, are you not their King?”

“Would I were not,” he replied sadly. “Could I cast off the cares and burdens of royalty, I could see its power and hollow splendour go with them without a sigh, and pass my days by thy side in a happiness I shall never know on this side the grave. But God’s will be done,” he added reverently, “it is not for man to repine against the decrees of Providence.”

And with a look full of affection he raised her hand to his lips.

“Let there be no more Buckingham, my lord, to cast their dark shadows between us,” she said, holding his hand and glancing in the direction of Wentworth; “that insolent man who turned your heart from me and dared to insult the daughter of Henri Quatre.”

“Hush! *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*,” interrupted the King, leading her towards the private door by which she had entered.

“Do not be long at the council,” she said, “for it is most important I should see you immediately about the masque.”

As soon as the curtains fell behind her, Charles turned to Wentworth, who was standing near the window.

“Our conference must end for to-day, Sir Thomas,” he said, “but we will request you to remain at our Court some little time, until we can carry out those intentions for your advancement which we meditate. Till then, adieu.”

The familiar friend had suddenly given place to the monarch, stately in his affability.

A suite of apartments had been assigned Wentworth within the precincts of the palace, and to these he now repaired. His first care was to pen an epistle to his wife, whom he knew to be most anxiously awaiting news from him, in which he recounted all that had passed in his interview with the King. He descanted warmly upon the reception he had met with, and the high hopes it had awakened. He despatched this by one of his trustiest servants, with strict injunctions to use all speed in its delivery.

CHAPTER III.

LUCY, COUNTESS OF CARLISLE.

THE next day Wentworth attended the King's levée. The gracious smile with which Charles recognised him was not lost upon the watchful courtiers, whose visages now reflected the royal sunshine ; but those who attempted to make a more demonstrative show of their change of opinion were quickly repelled by the freezing pride with which he met all advances.

As he was making his way through the crowd, he felt the light touch of a fan upon his shoulder ; turning round sharply he came face to face with a lady who had suddenly broken away from a buzzing flattering group of butterfly courtiers to thus accost him. A deeper colour and an almost embarrassed look overspread his features at the recognition, for he had observed her ere this, and had turned away his head to avoid being seen by her.

It was no other than the famous Countess of Carlisle, she whom Dryden called "The Helen of her country ;" whose charms are eulogised in more than one of the courtly Waller's poems ; the aunt of his Saccharissa, and the most famous and fascinating woman of her time. She was at this period in the very perfection of her beauty, being little more than twenty-one years of age. Gazing upon Vandyke's portrait, with Waller's verses in our mind, a feeling of disappointment comes upon us that we cannot realise their glowing description. But even that wonderful pencil could not transmit to canvas the varying charms of expression, which chased each

other as rapidly as shadows upon an April day across that fair face. In repose the features were haughty, yet pensive, with the languor of voluptuousness, a character which also distinguished the noble figure ; but the brilliant eyes when half veiled by their drooping lashes, the beautiful lips when they parted in smiles, the heightened colour raised by excitement, could metamorphose the whole countenance to love and tenderness, and invest it with a halo of fascination that enslaved every heart.

The gay, the wise, the gallant, and the grave,
 Subdued alike, all but one passion have ;
 No worthy mind but finds in hers there is
 Something proportioned to the rule of his ;
 While she with cheerful, but impartial grace
 (Born for no one, but to delight the race
 Of men), like Phœbus, so divides her light,
 And warms us, that she stoops not from her height.

So wrote Waller.

"What, not one word, and 'tis *so* long since we met," she said, in a voice and with a smile of the most bewitching fascination.

Wentworth was no more proof against the loveliness that beamed upon him than any other man, yet he replied almost coldly, although in the courtly strain of the day :

"It were impossible for Lady Carlisle to offend even did she wish to do so, and she has ever been most condescending to the humblest of her admirers ; but I could not thrust my country-bred and sombre person among the town gallants and their bravery of ribbons and laces."

"And do you imagine I have any taste for the society of these fops and gadflies?" she answered, her face suddenly lighting up with scorn. "I accept their homage as a queen does that of the meanest of her subjects, as my due, my right inalienable, but no more. *You* should know that mere bravery of ribbons and laces has no charms for me. Do not suppose that it is among such my hours are wasted. All women love flattery, it is the incense which men burn before the shrine of Venus, and it is grateful to every female nostril ; were I insensible to it I should be either more or less than woman, and I would be neither. Perhaps," she added, with a pretty assumption of confusion, "I defend myself too

warmly ; but I love not to forfeit the esteem of those whom I respect and who once respected me."

"Who still respects you, Lady Carlisle, as much as ever," answered Wentworth, his coldness melting away before her warmth.

"Then you will visit me before you leave the Court?" she said quickly. "To-morrow—yes, to-morrow it shall be—for I have company that will please you ; my poor house is honoured by something better than mere courtiers and fop-lings ; I promise that you shall find there men worthy even of your attention. Nay, I will take no denial."

Not knowing how to reject such persuasions, Wentworth reluctantly gave his word to be there.

This colloquy, which had taken place a little aside from the crowd, was observed by many eyes and commented upon by many tongues.

"What strange coquetry is this?" inquired one of his companion. "What motive can induce the lovely Carlisle to lower her haughty eyes upon this country knight, who has rendered himself so obnoxious to the Court party?"

"As well might you seek to solve the mystery of the Sphinx as to seek for the motives of a woman's actions, and above all for those of the Countess of Carlisle," replied the other, shrugging his shoulders ; "her plots and intrigues are numberless, and latterly she has inclined towards the Parliament party, to judge by the favour she shows that vulgar fellow Pym."

"When Lady Carlisle smiles upon a man," chimed in a third, "it is a certain proof that he is rising ; she never favours the falling one ; she has a rare instinct that way. But know you *not* it is said there were love passages between them when she was Lucy Percy, before Sir Thomas married Arabella Hollis?"

And the trio fell to with great gusto discussing this Court gossip.

Wentworth was most anxious to learn the King's intentions towards him, but majesty was not to be hurried, and so he was obliged to curb his impatience as best he could, and wait the royal pleasure. Towards the evening of the day following the levée, he remembered the promise he had given Lady Carlisle ; and although little inclined, considered himself compelled in honour to observe it.

The lady's house was situated close to the Palace, in what would now be considered a strange place of abode for such a personage—King Street; and yet that always narrow, and now grimy, thoroughfare, which has all but disappeared before the innovations of improvement, could boast amongst its residents names even more famous than hers. Here had lived the great High Admiral, Lord Howard, of Armada fame, and here had died, in penury, Edmund Spenser; here also lived another poet, Thomas Carew, and a generation after the time of which we write, the poet Earl of Dorset; these are but a few of the illustrious names which once graced the street.

In Paris the Duchess de Rambouillet created the first literary society of modern Europe, and the society of the *Précieuses* was at this period in its highest perfection, not having yet degenerated into those absurdities which Molière thereafter so felicitously ridiculed. It was Lady Carlisle's ambition to render her house a second Hôtel de Rambouillet, and herself a second Catherine de Vivonne. To this end her *salons*, if we may use the French expression, were thrown open to all who were famous in literature, art, or distinguished by birth or social position. The different conditions, however, of society in Paris and London, as well as the differing idiosyncrasies of the two famous ladies, rendered a perfect imitation impossible. In Paris, the iron hand of Richelieu rendered politics a forbidden subject, and he himself was a constant frequenter of the Hôtel; in London, politics were gradually becoming the all-absorbing topic to the exclusion of all others, and men and women could not meet together without discussing the affairs of the day. Finally, Lady Carlisle herself was a political *intriguante*—ever eager for State secrets, and ever ready to mix herself up in plots; she adhered to no party, but alternately favoured all, according to humour or inclination. Had she lived in France in the time of the Fronde she would have been of the foremost amongst the Chevreuses, De Longuevilles, De Sablés, who by their plots and intrigues did more than all the men to embroil their country in civil war.

Wentworth had no difficulty in discovering the house; the doors were open, attendants and pages in liveries of blue and gold waited in the hall, and sedan-chairs were setting down visitors. Annoyed with himself for having promised

this visit, he mounted the steps and gave his name. A page, bowing obsequiously, conducted him through an antechamber, at the end of which was a lofty archway covered by curtains of blue velvet, fringed with gold. These, at a signal from the attendant, were parted in the centre and raised for his admittance. So beautiful was the apartment in which he now found himself, that he stood for a moment gazing around him in silent admiration, forgetful of all else. By the soft light of tapers, shaded and concealed so as to subdue all glare, he saw a lofty spacious saloon, the walls tastefully draped with blue velvet embroidered with gold; hanging from the ceiling and from every niche were baskets of flowers; flowers indeed were everywhere, gathered in vases and wreaths, or scattered singly and making part of every ornament. Persian carpets covered the floor. The furniture, like the hangings, was blue and gold, and fashioned with all the skill of Italian artificers. As in the King's closet, there were cabinets of ivory and ebony of the most exquisite workmanship, costly articles of vertu, works of art in gold and silver that Cellini had chased; paintings from the hands of Reubens and Vandyke; tables of solid silver, Venetian mirrors; indeed, all that taste and luxury could desire and money purchase.

Facing the archway by which he had entered were windows opening to the ground into gardens, the beauty of which was only dimly visible by the pale light of the moon; and a peculiarly mystic effect was imparted by coloured lights artfully disposed among the trees and shrubs.

Wentworth arrived early, and only a few guests had preceded him.

Eagerly and with outstretched hand the hostess advanced to greet this desired visitor.

"This is your first visit to my poor abode, and I can perceive you are pleased with it," she said, looking up into his face.

"I could not have imagined aught so beautiful," he answered warmly; "I am almost tempted to ask whether I have not wandered in a dream into the enchanted palace of Armida."

"Will you then allow the enchantress to lead you to her bower?" she answered, laying her fingers upon his arm, and again gazing up at him with tender half-veiled eyes: "you

need not fear, you have long since proved yourself invulnerable to her spells."

How beautiful that queenly face looked in its melting mood; the fair skin flushed like the petals of a damask rose, its classic contour set off by the dark clustering hair curling upon the noble forehead, and flowing back upon the neck in ringlets confined by a jewelled bandeau; those dark liquid orbs could flash as brightly as the diamond pendants in her ears, and the brilliants were not purer than the throat they encircled; her dress was of blue velvet, sown with pearls, and half clouded with Spanish lace, a costume which softened the outlines of her haughty figure to an almost girlish beauty.

Wentworth was indeed beneath the spells of an enchantress, and might well tremble for his invulnerability.

Although it was September the night was soft and genial, and the foliage green and umbrageous as midsummer; scarcely a breath of air disturbed the deep shadows that slumbered in the white moonlight; out of the darkness of the embowered trees came the bright twinkling lights that looked as if some of "those patines of bright gold" which hung in the purple heavens had fallen to earth and lodged among their leaves. As the pair moved away from the windows among the mazy paths, the sound of voices was lost, and all was still as the shadows.

"You might be among the solitudes of Woodhouse-Wentworth, for all the vestiges of city life you find here, might you not?" she asked.

"It is truly *rus in urbe*," he answered.

"But you have no liking for Court and city."

"I could not endure the butterfly existence of a courtier, pass my life in frivolous amusements, and devote my mind to the fashion of a love-lock or a shoe-string."

"And yet your bucolic pursuits are scarcely more useful or noble."

"They are at least more beautiful."

"But not upon such should powers like yours be wasted. Your mind is like a noble sword rusting in its scabbard; drawn it could win bright honour and renown and glorious victories, sheathed it is useless."

"I am happy," he replied, after a momentary pause, "in the companionship of a true and loving wife, faithful friends,

good books, healthful exercise, and a quiet conscience. What more should a wise man desire?"

"Such homely wisdom is not an attribute of great minds; were it so, where would the world find its leaders? You say you are happy; it may be so, but you are not *contented*; your soul chafes and frets within its narrow prison. But the day of its release is at hand; England is waiting for you; buried in your savage north you know nothing of what is passing in the great world. I hold the secrets of all parties; and I tell you that unless an inflexible hand and a masterful intellect grasp the helm of the State we shall fall upon evil times. YOU ARE THE MAN!"

There was no coquetry, no melting tenderness in that face now, and although the voice was subdued to a whisper, the eyes were flashing, the nostrils quivering with excitement. She was all queenly now.

Wentworth was astonished at this sudden change, for he had known the Countess of Carlisle only as Lucy Percy, a beautiful and impassioned girl; he found her developed into an ambitious woman who might have sat at an Emperor's side. Her words thrilled him, and kindled latent fires within his soul, arousing thoughts too tumultuous for expression.

"You have a grand destiny before you, if you have the energy to work it out," she went on, "or if no false scruples or false pride intervene between the task and its accomplishment. Had Fate but have united our lots, what might we not have accomplished together! Do not start, I am not about to raise the ghost of the past, or to attempt to render your thoughts disloyal to Lady Wentworth; our lives are sundered, and we are kept apart by ties that never can be broken; the fault was more mine than yours, more a perverse destiny than either's. Yet the heart will sometimes rush to the lips and make itself heard, spite of all our efforts to suppress it."

She spoke these last words in the softest and most mournful of accents. At the same moment there were borne upon the air from some invisible orchestra, seemingly afar off, waves of sweet music that rose and fell, languished and faintly swelled again; now they seemed floating in the air, now rising up from the depths of the earth.

Wentworth was greatly embarrassed by the turn the

conversation had taken ; his companion perceived it, and was too good an actress to spoil the effect of a *coup de théâtre* by an undue prolongation of the scene. "Come," she said, after a brief pause, "I must return to my guests, or our absence will excite attention."

Greatly relieved by this proposal, Wentworth accompanied her back to the house. But her words had produced a deep impression upon his mind.

During their brief absence the numbers of the guests had considerably swelled, and a loud buzz of conversation filled the apartment.

Every tongue, however, was hushed, and every eye turned towards the window as Lady Carlisle entered leaning upon Wentworth's arm. Envious and hostile glances were cast upon him by the younger men, while the elder disguised their astonishment beneath inquiring and supercilious looks.

The Countess was in an instant surrounded by a bevy of eager flatterers, with whom she immediately commenced an animated conversation.

Wentworth glanced around. The guests were as various in rank and calling as the people whom he had seen assembled two days before in the ante-chamber at Whitehall. But all were men of mark, and distinguished either by birth, position, genius, or achievement—no others would have been welcomed.

There were many faces familiar to him, but scarcely a friendly one. The Parliament men had heard of his secession from their ranks and scowled upon him, while the courtiers, not yet certain of his footing at Court, were as yet fearful of compromising themselves.

There were but few ladies ; among these few, however, he recognised the beautiful and intriguing Lady Aubigny, and the proud and ambitious Duchess of Lennox, the widow of three husbands, who had aspired even to the hand of King James himself. But the Countess had scarcely, as yet, succeeded in infusing any considerable female element into this new form of society, which to the women, who did not dabble in politics, appeared tedious and pedantic.

Presently he caught sight of his friend Vandyke, conversing with a middle-aged portly-looking man, with long slightly grizzled hair, that straggled carelessly and undressed

about his neck and waved over a fine thoughtful brow ; it was a well-formed face, moustached and bearded in the fashion of the day, with the eye of a man of genius.

Wentworth advanced towards this pair and shook hands warmly with both.

"I understand, Mr. Jones," he said, after some conversation, "that you are designing a new masque for their Majesties. I have often received much pleasure from such shows in the time of the late King."

"I am, Sir Thomas, for lack of better employment," replied the gentleman addressed ; "not that such work is to be despised, for its incubation takes many an hour of thought, and the result is not altogether worthless."

"But friend Inigo would rather be spending his hours upon that wonderful palace he has so magnificently designed," interposed Vandyke.

"Ah, if I could but live to accomplish that," exclaimed the architect, his eyes lighting up with enthusiasm, "it would be for me an immortal monument ; but these miserable huckstering Commons, saving your presence, Sir Thomas, hold their purse-strings so tightly there is little chance of it, I fear ; unless indeed," he added, with a sly smile, "my friend Antony here should at last light upon the philosopher's stone, and so fill his Majesty's coffers."

"More unlikely things than that come to pass daily," replied the painter, with a grave face, "and I believe, even now, we are on the eve of the great secret."

"Well, well, I know naught about it," replied Jones hastily. "Will. Shakspeare said, 'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy,' and I am no stiff-necked unbeliever."

"It would be a marvellous discovery if ever it came to pass," said Wentworth gravely, "and most marvellous would be its effects upon the world."

"Visit me at Blackfriars ere you leave the Court, Sir Thomas," said Vandyke eagerly, "and I will show you wonders."

"Yet methinks, old friend, you have in your pencil a transmuter that turns all it touches into gold," observed Jones ; "better hold to that than begrime thy face and befoul thy lungs over charcoal and crucible and evil-smelling vapours."

Vandyke did not seem to relish these remarks and changed the conversation.

"When you joined us, Sir Thomas," he said, lowering his voice, "I was speaking to Jones of that strange incident that happened in the King's cabinet the other day; I think you witnessed it, I mean his Majesty's blood falling upon the neck of Bernini's bust."

"I did, indeed, witness it, and have thought much of it since," replied Wentworth. "God send it may not be an evil omen to his Majesty."

"You would say so did you know all," rejoined Vandyke, sinking his voice yet lower. "I will tell you. Bernini is an old friend of mine, it was through me he was employed. I sent him the three faces for models. Time passed on and he did not send the bust according to promise; I wrote to him to know the cause. His answer was very strange. He said that every time he looked upon my picture he was seized with such a strange dejection he could not work. 'There is such a fatal gloom upon that face,' he said, 'that I cannot rid myself of a presentiment *that it is doomed to a violent death.*'"

Both listeners turned pale.

"You have not spread this abroad?" inquired Wentworth, after a solemn pause.

"This is the first time I have spoken of it, and I was so frightened, I burned the letter the instant after I read it."

"Then let me conjure you to keep it secret, for remember prophecies sometimes work their own fulfilment."

"What solemn matter of discussion has raised such clouds upon your brows, gentlemen?" exclaimed a silvery voice beside them, "surely, it must be theological, by the sourness of your visages! Is it Brownism or Presbyterianism, free-will or predestination, grace or election, which engages your minds? If so, put it aside, I beseech you, for some more congenial subject."

The speaker was Lady Carlisle, who had stolen upon them unawares.

"It is not any of them, I assure you, lady," replied Jones, "or you would not find me here."

"But did I not hear Sir Thomas talking about the gift of prophecy?" she inquired sharply; "surely that phrase has a portentous sound. But as you will not take me into

your confidence, allow me to ask your attention to a poem which Mr. Waller has composed in my honour."

They turned their heads in the direction indicated, and saw a young gentleman of some two or three and twenty, exquisitely and somewhat foppishly dressed, slight of figure, pleasing and handsome of face, standing near one of the tables with a paper in his hand. This was Mr. Edmund Waller, afterwards to be celebrated both as a poet and a politician, and who was already known as a writer of smooth verses which attracted some attention. Lady Carlisle loved to gather such about her, and, in imitation of her French model, she never held a *soirée*, to use a modern expression, at which some copy of verses or short essay was not read and discussed.

All conversation being hushed, the poet read, in a musical but somewhat affected tone, the following verses :

Madam, of all the sacred muse inspired
Orpheus alone could with the woods comply ;
Their rude inhabitants his song admired,
And Nature's self in those that could not lie ;
Your beauty next our solitude invades
And warms us, shining through the thickest shades.

Nor ought the tribute which the wondering Court
Pays your fair eyes, prevail with you to scorn
The answer and consent to that report
Which, echo-like, the country does return ;
Mirrors are taught to flatter, but our springs
Present the impartial images of things.

A rural judge disposed of beauty's prize ;
A simple shepherd was preferred to Jove ;
Down to the mountains from the partial skies
Came Juno, Pallas, and the Queen of Love
To plead for that which was so justly given
To the bright Carlisle of the Court of Heaven.

Carlisle ! a name which all our woods are taught,
Loud as their Amaryllis, to resound ;
Carlisle ! a name which on the bark is wrought
Of every tree that's worthy of the wound.
From Phœbus' rage our shadows and our streams
May guard us better than from Carlisle's beams.

Great applause necessarily greeted a poem which was in praise of the lady of the house.

"It has but one fault, Mr. Waller," she observed archly, "it is too flattering."

"Pardon my daring to differ with you, madam," answered the poet, "but it is with your generosity and not your judgment, which can too surely detect the poorness of my composition. I contradict when I say it is all faults, and its worst is its unworthiness of its subject, which is beyond the descriptive powers of any pen, much less so weak a reed as mine."

"Mr. Waller, you are a courtier," replied the lady, curtsying to the ground.

"But, Mr. Vandyke," she continued, turning to the painter, "I received the other day from Italy some additions to my collection of medals, upon which I want your judgment, and you, Sir Thomas, I know, are a judge of those things."

Those of the company who were not interested in the subject formed knots and conversed upon more congenial topics, and several ladies, taking the arms of cavaliers, strolled out into the moonlight and flirted among the shady groves and bowers.

At the farther end of the apartment was gathered a group, the members of which had mingled scarcely at all in the general conversation, men who had kept aloof both from artists and courtiers, by whom they were regarded with expressions of disdain and superciliousness. They were more plainly dressed than the other guests, and there was a sober gravity in their mien that never relaxed. Lady Carlisle occasionally exchanged a few words with them, but seemed to choose the time for such notice when the attention of the rest of the company was diverted in another direction.

There was one remarkable figure in this group which stood out from the rest. This personage had entered almost upon the heels of Wentworth, but was up to the present unseen by him; he had come in time to witness the tender and coquettish welcome the hostess had bestowed upon him, and to see them stroll arm-in-arm into the garden; he had watched the scene, half hidden by the curtains that covered the entrance to the apartment, with lowering brows; after they were gone he had cast himself into a chair in the obscurest corner of the room. Although all the sober-faced men gathered about him with an air of almost deference, he

little resembled them. His manner was bold, insolent, almost rakish, and his dress was rich and not devoid of bright colours. His portrait is worth sketching, for thereafter he was to become one of the foremost men of his country.

It was a figure cast in an herculean mould, athletic and inclining to corpulence; the features were somewhat coarse, but full of energy and intelligence; the head was peculiarly formed, the forehead rising to a peak, the hair was long and curled, as was also the moustache and chin beard; there was usually, though it was absent on the present occasion, a good-humoured smile upon the thick lips and in the quick penetrating eye. The massive jaw and chin betokened an almost savage firmness of purpose, beneath which lurked a disagreeable expression of mocking irony.

This man was, John Pym.

"Is not that Wentworth upon whom my Lady Carlisle smiles so sweetly?" inquired one of the group.

"Can you not see it is?" growled Pym.

"What brings him to Court?"

"That which brought Judas to the Lord's Supper."

"What do you mean?"

"Bah! where have you been not to hear the news? My brave Sir Thomas has been sent for by the King, has been closeted alone with him. What think you of that, after his brave speeches?"

"I have heard some rumour of this. But we should not be too hasty. He is a man of weight and talent, whom we cannot afford to lose. We must not condemn him unheard."

"He shall not be condemned unheard," responded Pym grimly. "I will have his recantation from his own lips, although I have had it already from lips that I can trust better."

"Whose?"

"His brother-in-law's, Denzil Hollis, a true man."

He rose from his seat, and advanced towards the place where Wentworth was conversing with the Countess and Lady Aubigny.

"Sir Thomas Wentworth," he said, "if these ladies can spare your society for a few moments, I have something for your private ear."

The tone in which these words were spoken was polite, but not without a touch of sarcasm.

Wentworth's face flushed for an instant as he answered calmly, "I shall presently be at your service, Mr. Pym."

Lady Carlisle turned pale; she feared a challenge. Pym met her anxious look with a smile of contemptuous denial, that only half satisfied her.

Wentworth calmly continued his conversation for several minutes, deigning no further attention to Pym, who bit his lip and twisted his moustache.

"Now, Mr. Pym, I am ready to listen to you," said Wentworth presently.

Without a word the other led the way through the window into the grounds.

The Countess followed them with anxious eyes.

"There is no quarrel, I hope," observed Lady Aubigny.

"I hope not—I almost fear—had I not better endeavour to prevent it?"

And not waiting for a reply the Countess hurried after them.

"So Lucy is casting her lures to bring back her old lover," said Lady Aubigny with a meaning smile.

"But Pym will have no rivals," replied another lady.

"He is likely to have many. She coquets with him only for the sake of the influence it gives her over the Parliament party."

"And with Wentworth, probably, because hereafter he may have some influence at Court; she loves to thus hold the balance between the extremes."

In the meantime, Pym led the way until quite removed from the sounds and lights of the house, then he faced round.

"Sir Thomas Wentworth," he said, "is it true you intend to go no farther with us?"

"I may be pardoned if I plead ignorance of the meaning of words so abrupt and undefined," replied Wentworth coldly; "but if you would ask me whether I intend to league myself with a faction—for since his Majesty has been graciously pleased to grant the prayers of his people, those who persevere to put themselves in opposition to him are factious men—I answer, No."

"Then I tell you, Sir Thomas Wentworth," said Pym, folding his arms upon his breast and speaking with suppressed yet savage energy, "that if you detach yourself from us you

are lost. Though you leave me I will never leave you until I see your head upon the block."

"Insolent!" cried Wentworth, grasping the hilt of his sword.

But at that moment a female figure glided out of the shadows and interposed itself between them.

"Gentlemen," she exclaimed haughtily, "the Spring Garden is some quarter of a mile below; brawling may be common there, but it is not in the grounds of the Countess of Carlisle."

"Your reproof is well merited, madam," said Wentworth; "I humbly apologise for my momentary forgetfulness, and take my leave."

She made no effort this time to detain him, and a few moments afterwards he had quitted the place.

"Are you mad to seek a quarrel at such a time as this?" she demanded of Pym, when they were alone.

"Do not play the hypocrite, madam," he retorted angrily; "do not pretend to consider my safety to hide your anxiety for this renegade."

"Jealous, I vow!" she answered ironically. "I ought indeed to feel honoured to be made the subject of a brawl, as though I were some tavern wench. I find you are as shallow as the rest of your sex, who cannot construe a woman's smiles to aught but love."

"You loved him once, and would now 'lure this tercel gentle back again' to swell the number of your slaves."

"You seem to forget that Sir Thomas Wentworth has a wife," replied the lady, haughtily. "As for my motives, when you have recovered your humour I may explain them, but not before."

CHAPTER IV.

AT ANTONY VANDYKE'S.

ON the morning after his visit to Lady Carlisle, Wentworth received a summons to attend the King in his cabinet.

Charles was alone. He greeted his visitor with one of his sweet, melancholy smiles and extended his hand, which Wentworth raised respectfully to his lips.

For a few moments he conversed upon indifferent subjects ; upon the grand masque that was in preparation ; upon pictures and medals, until Sir Thomas began to fear he had sent for him to no other purpose. He was mistaken.

"Enough of this," said the King, breaking off suddenly in the midst of some observation upon the styles of different painters. "It was not to talk upon such trifles I brought you hither ; and yet I love these things better, I fear, than statecraft. Often and often do I regret I was born a king. I envy such men as you, Wentworth—men of cultivated tastes, happy in the love of wife and children, happy in that blessing which princes can never know, the tranquillity of a home."

"You need envy no man, my liege, such blessings, since they are yours already. No prince in Christendom could have a partner more beautiful and more loving than her Majesty, or a domestic life purer and happier."

"Truly, sometimes at Hampton we obtain a few hours of privacy almost free from cares, but they serve only to make us pine for more. And even those brief moments are often

clouded. Ah! if it were not for the influence of those meddling priests, how happy we might be! But I am again wandering," he added hastily. Then, with a complete change of tone, and speaking with startling abruptness, he went on: "Wentworth, you know what Buckingham was to me? As a statesman he was too often a false guide, but as a friend, a companion, he had graces of mind and person, and above all an indefinable fascination, of which I have rarely met the like; and these things were intensified to me by long association. From my youth upwards he was ever by my side, until he indeed became my *alter ego*; and, you know, our whole lives are moulded by habit. But he had lived his time; he was the pilot for a summer sea, not for the storm and breakers that I see afar off in the not distant future. The helmsman for *that* time must have a hand of iron, a brain of steel, a will of adamant, an integrity of snow, a loyalty of fire. By birth and genius he must command as well as win the respect of the nation. *You* have all these, and *you* are the only man in England who can take Buckingham's place and steer us through the tempest."

There was a warmth and frankness in Charles's voice which veiled even the suspicion of flattery, and a graciousness and urbanity all the more pleasing since they never sank the king.

"I, sire!" exclaimed Wentworth, startled by the suddenness of the proposition, which came upon him as the fulfilment of Lady Carlisle's prophetic words.

"You," answered the King, laconically, and waiting his answer.

"My poor services, my very life, the lives of all I own, are your Majesty's, not to solicit, but to command," replied Wentworth, fervently. "My only fear is that you rate my abilities too highly; but such as they are, they are all yours."

"We thank you," answered the King, assuming royalty for the first time; "and have no apprehensions upon that score. But your rise must not be too sudden. Enmity and detraction you will certainly draw upon yourself, for those are the penalties paid for kings' favours; but if the storm rose too suddenly, ere you had firmly taken your stand, it might overwhelm you. As an earnest of future honours I present you with these letters patent creating you Baron Wentworth."

Overcome by emotion, Sir Thomas knelt at the King's feet and reverently kissed his hand.

"To-morrow you will return into Yorkshire," continued Charles. "In the course of two or three weeks other letters patent will follow, creating you Viscount; and these, after another interval, will be followed by a commission appointing you President of the North. That post will afford you an opportunity of displaying your talents for government, for, as you know, it is one of almost absolute power. No easy task lies before you, as Lord Sunderland, whom I shall recall in a few days, has been most lax in his administration. All is confusion in the North. The fines upon the Papists are not enforced. All order and subjection are suspended."

"To thank your Majesty for such honours would be impossible," replied Wentworth; "therefore I must show my gratitude by deeds, not words."

"And that you *will* do," responded Charles, emphatically. Then changing his tone once more to its former deep melancholy he went on, "And yet little gratitude is due to me for thrusting these cares upon you. I rob you of leisure, of happiness, of home tranquillity, and give you in their place barren honours, a mere crown of thorns; the day may come when you will bitterly reproach me for my fatal gift. But enough of business. Two hours hence we go down the river to Blackfriars to sit to Vandyke. Will you favour us with your company?"

Such requests from royalty are tantamount to commands; as a matter of course Wentworth assented, and, taking the king's last words as a congé, departed.

Two hours afterwards the royal barge containing the King, Queen, and suite departed from Whitehall Stairs for Blackfriars.

The Thames was usually royalty's high road when it went eastward; the broad, noble stream was a thoroughfare so much easier to thread than were the narrow, foul streets; and the prospect was so much pleasanter to the eye than that presented by the land. A sail from Westminster to the City was a delightful trip in those days; there were no bridges to break the proportions of the river; on the southern side were only meadows and trees; on the northern the gardens of the great nobles, whose mansions lay hidden back among the foliage, stretched down to the water's edge; the green

monotony was in many places broken by handsome water-gates and public stairs, upon which crowds of watermen plied for hire. Nor was royalty singular in its preference for river travelling, nobles and citizens shared its taste, and the Thames was alive with gilded barges and humble boats bearing gentle and simple eastward and westward.

Upon landing at Blackfriars Stairs—there was no bridge there for many years afterwards—two carriages, which had been sent forward through the City, were found waiting for the King and Queen and their attendants. As the visit was private the suite was small, being composed of only two lords and two ladies in waiting, Wentworth, and a couple of pages.

All the King's artists, with few exceptions—Inigo Jones, who lived in Scotland Yard, being of that number—resided in one great mansion, palatially furnished, at Blackfriars, situated close to the river's brink. Here were spent some of the happiest hours of Charles Stuart's life. There was nothing he loved better than to sit in Vandyke's painting-room, conversing pleasantly and unrestrainedly upon art, while the great limner transferred his features to an immortal canvas; thus it is we have so many portraits of that sad face. The Queen also, although she knew little of art, had inherited some of the Medicean taste, and loved to prattle about it in her lively French way, and look at all the pictures in progress. This time, however, she had come to sit with the king for that portrait of the royal pair which is still to be seen at Windsor.

Vandyke met his distinguished visitors at the door and conducted them up the broad oaken stairs to his painting-room, a lofty handsome apartment fitted up with every comfort and convenience. When their Majesties were seated the two lords went to the great mullioned window, which commanded a view of the river, and watched the passing and repassing of the boats and barges; the ladies placed themselves behind the Queen's chair, the pages took the same position to the King.

"To judge by the pictures in different stages of progress, you seem to be fully occupied just now," observed the King.

"Indeed, your Majesty, so much so that I would many of my patrons took their faces elsewhere."

"But where else could they be so fairly presented?" said the King, smiling. "Your quarters have at least the merit of quietude," he said presently. "Although I suppose the revellers from the playhouse disturb you sometimes."

"Not half so much as the droning psalms of the Puritans, which are seldom out of my ears, your Majesty; they swarm about here like bees in a hive."

"Ah, those Huguenots, how I hate them!" said the Queen, bitterly.

"Hypocrites all, your Majesty; for do they not deal in feathers and all the vanities, as they call them, their snuffling preachers are always denouncing, encouraging the things they protest bring men to damnation, to fill their own purses?"

In the meantime Wentworth, while examining the numerous pictures that were scattered about in all parts of the room, came suddenly upon one which riveted his attention, spite of himself. It was a half-finished portrait of Lady Carlisle. Gazing fixedly upon those haughty yet pensive features, he fell into a reverie, from which he was aroused only when the sitting had come to an end, and their Majesties were preparing to take their departure.

"Come hither, *Baron* Wentworth, and tell me what you think of our good Vandyke's last work."

The sound of his new title, upon which the King had purposely laid strong emphasis, made the colour rush to Wentworth's dark brow. He could see the courtiers exchange glances as he approached the picture.

"And now, *Baron*," said the King, when Wentworth had expressed a high eulogium upon the really fine portrait, "as you return to Yorkshire so soon, and have possibly affairs of your own to engage your attention, we will willingly dispense with your further attendance."

"Under your Majesty's favour, if Sir Thomas would be pleased to spend an hour with me, I should feel highly honoured, as I have never yet had an opportunity of taking his portrait, which I should much love to do," interposed Vandyke.

The King expressed his perfect satisfaction with the arrangement, to which Wentworth agreed.

"You will hear from us shortly," said Charles, as he passed out.

The Queen's leave-taking of the painter was gracious and cordial, of Wentworth cold and haughty. It was evident that he had not won her favour.

"And now, *Baron*, let me congratulate you upon your new dignity," said Vandyke, when they were alone, "and prophesy at the same time that it is but the stepping-stone to others. I must make the most of our friendship, for ere long you will be too great a man to call a poor painter, friend."

"Did I believe you meant those words our friendship would end at this moment," replied Wentworth earnestly. "The man whom the King honours with his friendship as he does you can have no superior; and, even were it not so, I honour men for what they *are*, and not for what the world calls them."

"Forgive me, I did but jest," answered Vandyke, grasping his hand. "But come, before you sit I must show you my laboratory."

He led the way through a small door concealed by a large picture, and along a narrow passage, at the end of which was another door, at which he paused and tapped. It was opened by an old man in a long gown, and with a beard descending upon his chest, whose features were begrimed almost to blackness by smoke and dirt.

The room into which they entered was narrow and confined, with a small window near the ceiling. Over a small furnace was suspended a crucible, and several retorts were simmering over charcoal fires. Bottles and jars of all sizes and shapes, bearing strange cabalistical characters, were scattered everywhere, and the atmosphere was dense and overpowering with the sickening odour of fused chemicals.

"And how goes on the work?" inquired Vandyke, eagerly.

"So well it were impossible it should go better," replied the old man.

"We are on the very eve of the grand secret," cried the painter, excitedly.

As he spoke a bell rang sharply.

"That is to tell me that a sitter is waiting in the painting-room," he exclaimed angrily. "Ah, if these people would but give me a little time I might hasten the grand discovery."

"And can you prefer such pursuits as these, to the pure atmosphere of art, and the noble beauty of those creations of your own hand and brain that we have left yonder?" demanded his guest.

"And why not? Did I possess the genius of Da Vinci, Raffaele, and Buonarotti combined, could it give me the boundless and immortal fame I shall gain by transmuting dross to gold, by distilling, perhaps, that precious elixir which can give us limitless youth and life? For the one secret is doubtless contained within the other. Those canvases will perish, and in a few centuries my genius become a dim tradition, like that of Apelles; but such a work as that could never perish. And, to fall from the clouds to the earth again, my philosophy is the epicurean, the end of life is enjoyment—*ergo*, gold is our chiefest blessing. But I am waited for. Will you go with me?"

Wentworth was only too pleased to escape out of the foul atmosphere. But his satisfaction changed to chagrin when, upon entering the painting-room, his eyes fell upon Lady Carlisle.

She greeted him with one of her sweetest smiles, but with no appearance of surprise; probably the meeting was not altogether accidental.

"Have you also come to be immortalised by the wondrous pencil of Master Vandyke, *Baron Wentworth*?" she inquired; "do not look surprised," she added, lowering her voice, "there is not anything that passes in the King's most private chamber that is not known to me almost as soon as it is done or said, and that by no witchcraft either. Have not my last night's words come true, my future *Lord President of the North*?"

"You indeed amaze me," murmured Wentworth.

"Did I not tell you," she continued, her eyes sparkling with triumph, "that you alone could be the successor of Buckingham?"

"I cannot pretend to know how you have gained a knowledge of what I believed was known only to his Majesty and myself," answered Wentworth gravely; "but I would ask of you not to bruit it abroad."

"That I should not have done even without your desire; with me the secret is sacred. But you should not be angered because your prophetess exults in the fulfilment of her fore-

cast," she added softly. "You know not what joy it is to me to see your noble genius at last appreciated."

What a look of pensive tenderness there was in the eyes, and what a low quivering sigh broke from the beautiful lips as she uttered these last words.

"I am not angered, and I thank you for your good wishes," he said, turning aside his head to avoid that look which was casting a glamour over him and subduing his very soul.

"So cold," she murmured, just loud enough to thrill his ears. Then changing her manner suddenly to one of deep earnestness, she said, "Avoid Pym, he is a dangerous man, and your most bitter foe."

"I shall not seek Mr. Pym," replied Wentworth haughtily, "if he does not seek me."

"Let him not fix a quarrel upon you, I implore," she went on even more earnestly; "such a man as you need not fear an imputation upon his courage. If you weigh my warning with the truth of my previous words you will know it is no idle one."

The whole of this brief conversation had been carried on in a low tone in the deep recess of the window, and Vandyke and his attendant had removed to a distance quite out of earshot.

Wentworth gave a reluctant promise to follow her injunction, after which she sat for the finishing touches of the portrait he had lately been contemplating.

When she departed he conducted her to her sedan-chair that was waiting without. Her last word as she pressed his hand was, "Remember."

Book III.—In the Shadow of Death.

CHAPTER I.

A WINTER'S EVENING.

AUTUMN had faded into winter, cold, leafless, and tempestuous—at least it was so in the North. The trees in the park at Wentworth-Woodhouse were no longer green and umbrageous, a few parched leaves yet clung to the oak and beech, but all the others were gaunt and bare and white with snow, which lay deep in the hollows and covered the uplands; the streams flowed sluggishly beneath a thin layer of ice, a driving wind from the north whirled the white drifts in eddies and made the dry leaves on the branches and those huddled under sheltering nooks crackle as though a flame had passed over them. There was a leaden sky, dull red in the west where the sun was just sinking, and a gray mist was slowly blurring all outlines.

The dreariness without heightened the cheerfulness within. A huge fire of ponderous logs blazing on the great hearth cast a ruddy glare over the dark oaken walls and flashed upon the windows to die away in the gloom without.

On one side the fireplace, fast asleep, was a man of about fifty years of age, whose clerical dress indicated his profession; a man with a fair, unwrinkled, placid face, that denoted an easy and benignant disposition; this was the Reverend Charles Greenwood, who had been Wentworth's tutor at college, his guardian and companion during his travels, and

the faithful and devoted friend of his after-life, whom he loved and revered with the feelings of a son. On the other side of the fireplace dozed a man of graver mien, who might have been forty years of age; this was Sir George Radcliffe, Wentworth's secretary, and one of his truest and most esteemed friends.

Upon a low stool facing the fire, but at some distance off, her chin resting upon her hand, sat Ethel, the red glow falling full upon her face; she was in deep thought, conjuring up strange images in the burning embers.

Standing in the recess of one of the windows looking out upon the dreary landscape, stood Lady Wentworth; she was watching across the park for her husband's return. But not even the huge fire could warm the extremities of that great apartment, with its bare oaken floor polished to an icy smoothness, and she soon turned away shivering towards the genial region of the hearth. Coming lightly behind Ethel she clasped her hands playfully across the thoughtful face, making the young girl start.

"My child, thou wilt burn thy pretty eyes out of thy head if thou stare at those fierce flames much longer," she said laughingly. "What dost thou see there so interesting? Some stalwart young knight doing battle against the dragons that guard the enchanted castle, in which, in thy dreams, thou art kept prisoner? or dost thou see Cambuscan Bold mounted on his brazen steed galloping through the air, that my lord read to us about in old Chaucer, last night?"

"My lord is a most excellent reader," put in the chaplain, catching the last words as he suddenly roused himself; "his emphasis is most impressive."

"Indeed, I scarcely know," answered Ethel, neither of the ladies noticing this interruption. "I could not tell you of what I was thinking."

"Perhaps I could help you," whispered Lady Wentworth in her ear. "Was not your romance nearer home, and the name of your knight—*Launcelot*?"

"Oh no, no, no! indeed you are mistaken," replied Ethel, earnestly.

"Oh no, no, no!" cried Lady Wentworth, imitating her. "But it would not have been a dreadful crime if it had been yes, yes, yes!" Then in a more sober tone she added: "It is strange we did not see him before he departed on his travels."

"Did not his father forbid him to come here again, and did not Sir Thomas also enforce the injunction?"

"Young gentlemen in love are not usually so obedient."

"But he would not dare come here against Sir Thomas's express command."

"Then you think my lord's command should be even more terribly deterrent than his father's?"

"No, but this is Sir Thomas's house," replied Ethel, colouring.

"Were it a king's house a true lover would invade it did it contain his mistress. I do not infer that Mr. Launcelot is not a true lover, but I think you would love him better were he a little bolder. I know I should, were I in your place."

"But we are not lovers, dear lady."

At that moment she was interrupted by the sound of heavy footsteps and the jingle of spurs.

"Ah, it is my lord," cried Lady Wentworth, springing up and running to the door, which opened at the same moment to admit Wentworth, wrapped in a horseman's cloak.

"How long you have been, my lord," she said, holding up her face to be kissed.

"Scarcely longer than I expected," he answered, embracing her tenderly; "but much longer than I desired, for it is anything rather than pleasant riding."

She was busy unwinding the folds of his great cloak while a servant pulled off his boots, and Ethel drew an arm-chair close to the fire.

Sir George and Mr. Greenwood rose to greet him as he drew near the hearth.

"Nay, nay, keep your seats, old friends, let me not disturb you," he said, waving his hand.

"Shall we have lights?" inquired Lady Wentworth.

"No, love, I like it better thus; but I will have a pipe of tobacco, in which my old friend here will join me. As to Sir George, I know he has no more love for the Virginian weed than had his late Majesty King James of blessed memory."

"Nay, my prejudice is not so strong as that," replied Radcliffe. "I dislike not the fumes, though my stomach cannot abide the bitter acrid taste; but it is the affectation

of our green youth, of which I saw so much in London, that chiefly nauseated me ; they must have masters forsooth to teach them how to take tobacco gracefully ! ”

“ Yes, to teach them the *gulan ebolitis*, the *euripus*, the whiff, when to suppress and how to emit the smoke,” added Wentworth, laughing. “ All this is mere pedantry ; but I love a good honest pipe for all that ; it smoothes a ruffled mind, tranquillises irritated nerves, and, without putting faith in all the medicinal virtues attributed to it, I believe aids the powers of digestion.”

The pipe which Lady Wentworth brought from a nook, where it was always kept, was much like our modern ones in form. The stem was rather short, the bowl barrel-shaped and small, and made of silver ; she filled it with her own delicate fingers, while Ethel ignited a small piece of the charcoal of juniper wood, which she held between a small pair of silver tongs made for the purpose. Then the ladies seated themselves upon low stools, one upon each side my lord’s chair.

“ I have often thought,” said Wentworth, slowly drawing the smoke into his mouth and then puffing it through his nostrils, as was the custom of that time, “ that had this nicotiana been known in the Augustan age, how would that most luxurious of philosophers, my good friend Horace, have enjoyed its fumes seated in his chimney-corner with his *merum diota*, when

alta stet nive candidum
Soracte, nec jam sustineant onus
Silvæ laborantes, geluque
Flumina constiterint acuto,

or in his garden under the shadows of his vines in the burning heat of summer, how he would have sung its praises, how his luxurious indolence would have revelled beneath its soporific influence.”

“ Truly,” observed Mr. Greenwood ; “ but he is the only Roman we can so picture. Virgil would have been too stately ; Juvenal would have fulminated a ‘ counterblast ; ’ Catullus would not have infected his breath with such an odour lest it should have offended his Lesbia ; Ovid might have tried it to soothe the pangs of exile——”

“ Hold, for mercy’s sake, Mr. Greenwood, and do not quite overwhelm us poor unlearned women with all this eru-

dition," interrupted Lady Wentworth, laughing. "When you and my lord begin to talk of those old Romans and to quote Latin, we have to sit like mutes, and that you know is contrary to the nature of our sex."

"The lady is right," remarked Sir George; "should we not rather converse upon some subject in which we might hear their sweet voices?"

"Or, better still, if my lord would but read to us another tale from Chaucer," suggested the lady.

"That will I, sweetheart, when I have finished my tobacco," he answered, his face lighting up at the mention of his favourite poet, "for who can discourse so eloquently as he? Who is so tender, so wise, so humorous? Had he lived amongst them, the ancients would have hailed him as a worthy peer of their highest, as he is, beyond compare, the greatest of the moderns."

"Surely we might place rugged old Ben Jonson beside him," observed Greenwood.

"In humour, perhaps, and knowledge of mankind; but Jonson has no tenderness."

"What say you to Spenser or the gentle Shakspeare?"

"Spenser equals him in descriptive power, but he has no humour, and never gives us a real man. Of Shakspeare I have read but little; he is King Charles's favourite poet, but you know I care little for plays."

At that moment the conversation was interrupted by the deep tones of the bell of the outward gate—a sound which roused a curious excitement in all the family circle. What visitor could it be at this late hour? Through the deep baying of the dogs they could hear the falling chains and the bolts withdrawn.

Then, after a brief interval, an attendant entered to announce that a courier from Whitehall had arrived, and craved to see my lord viscount.

Pale with excitement—for he guessed his errand—Wentworth rose to his feet, and ordered him to be admitted. The lady looked anxious, for she had not yet forgotten those evil days when her husband was taken from her, and the name of a king's messenger had not yet lost its terrors for her.

The next moment the attendant re-entered with lights, followed by a man booted and cloaked, who, with a respectful

reverence, handed Wentworth a packet tied with red silk, and bearing the royal seal.

"You have had a rough journey, friend," he said, holding the packet unbroken.

"I' faith, my lord, yes; for the last hundred miles," replied the courier.

"Provide him with everything he requires, and see he is well cared for. By the morning I will have my answer ready for his Majesty."

The man bowed, and was conducted from the apartment.

"What is it, my lord—nothing evil, I trust?" inquired Lady Wentworth, anxiously.

"Evil ! it is news that will make thy heart leap, sweet-heart," he answered. "I could tell thee the contents of this packet without opening it; I knew them before I left London. I have kept the news as a surprise for thee; none knows of it but my old friend here," pointing to Greenwood, "who has been always, and ever will be, my confidant and counsellor in all things. But I see thou art burning with curiosity, and I will keep you on the rack no longer."

Cutting the cord with his dagger, and breaking the seal, he drew forth a large sheet of parchment. It was his commission appointing him Lord President of the North.

"What a triumph this will be over the Saviles," exclaimed Lady Wentworth; "they will gnaw their hearts with spite."

"What think you of our good King now?" cried her husband, enthusiastically. "Did I not know his noble heart—did I not tell you his old love for me would awaken? He has given into my hands a great trust; I pray God give me the talents to fulfil it worthily; but at least it shall not lack the will, for from this time forth I devote my heart and life to his service, and no thought of self shall stand between it and me, not even though it were the shadow of the headsman."

The solemnity with which he uttered these words struck awe to all present.

"But why is my little Ethel alone silent!" he asked, with a sudden change of tone. "Does not she rejoice with the rest in this noble fortune?"

"Can you ask such a question?" replied the young girl earnestly. "Have I any joy or happiness except in yours and my dear lady's here, for are you not my whole world? I do indeed wish you joy on this great honour, but——"

"But what, dear child?" he inquired, laying his hand upon her head.

"You will think me a foolish girl," she went on, lowering her eyes, and blushing crimson, "but when you enter upon this great office, its cares will take up all your time, and your company will be lost to us."

"Ah, truly, my lord," cried Lady Wentworth gravely, "I did not think of that."

"Nor I," he said; "that fair head is shrewder than either of ours," and he stooped down and pressed his lips upon her forehead. "And yet I should not caress you for showing me the thorn hidden beneath my rose leaves. But never fear, I will always find a little time to spend in this dear company. But see, here comes the supper."

Six o'clock was the winter supper-hour at Wentworth-Woodhouse, and by nine the whole household was in bed.

CHAPTER II.

MY LORD PRESIDENT OF THE NORTH.

GREAT was the surprise and consternation which spread through the counties of Yorkshire, Cumberland, Westmoreland, Durham, and Northumberland, when the news went abroad of the appointment of the new President. Wentworth was known throughout the West Riding of Yorkshire as a man of stern and inflexible will, who would enforce the law to the utmost point, and this character, as usual, increasing in momentum with the distance it traversed, was borne with the news to the remotest parts of the presidentship, where not even the name of Wentworth had been ever heard, rousing in advance hostility and opposition to his authority.

Thus when he made his progress through the counties under his jurisdiction, he encountered everywhere a front of sullen defiance. But these malcontents soon discovered that they had to deal with a man of no common genius, with one whose powers of will and mind could sweep down without even a struggle their feeble and disorganised opposition. On the other hand they found him to be just as he was inflexible; oppressive only where the law was so, most stern and most exacting with the great, least so with the poor and the weak. Never before had the authority of the Crown been so fully enforced in those remote and savage regions, which had, until then, on account of their great distance, remained nearly independent of the central power. In almost any other age of our history this incorruptible justice would have won him

many partisans among the poorer classes, who were mostly bettered by it, and it did so in the more rural and remote districts where the new ideas had not penetrated, but in the towns, and even in the villages, there was a ferment against authority of all kinds, whether harsh or mild, not to be appeased. Wentworth well knew the men who stirred up the strife against him, and his hand fell heavily upon them, more especially did he mark the Saviles out for his vengeance; their brief triumph had long since been turned to discomfiture and bitter humiliation. "No man," says Clarendon, transferring to him Plutarch's epitaph upon Sylla, "did ever exceed him in doing good to his friends or in doing mischief to his enemies, for his acts of both kinds were most notorious." In the old castle of York, where he held his High Court of Justice, not the King himself exceeded him in stately dignity and ceremonious magnificence, for he held the wise maxim, too much disregarded in these days, that in the symbols and outward forms of authority lie much of its potentiality. And woe to those who dared to infringe in the least his rigid rules of etiquette.

Foiled in every scheme he had undertaken against Wentworth, John Savile, half-mad with baffled hate, resorted to petty insult. One day while my Lord President was holding his Court of Justice, he and his inseparable companion Bellasis, swaggered into the great hall, and, hats on, lounged into such a conspicuous position as could not escape observation.

The trial going forward was that of a peasant who had been evicted from his small farm with much cruelty by a rich landowner. Wentworth decided that the eviction had been grossly unjust, and, after severely reprimanding the culprit, ordered him to pay a heavy compensation for the act he had committed.

A murmur of approbation ran through the Court, above which, however, rose the harsh tones of Savile's voice :

"A grossly unjust decision," he said. "If this becomes a precedent our lands are no longer our own, but are at the mercy of every boor who may choose to dispute our rights."

"Were it my case, I should appeal to the King against the decision of this petty tyrant," chimed in Bellasis.

Wentworth called the usher to him.

"These men," he said, "have dared to enter a Hall of

Justice without uncovering their heads, let them be instantly taken into custody."

They did not anticipate a measure so peremptory as this even from him, and would have offered a determined resistance had not surprise held them until they were secured by the soldiers.

"Yorkshiremen!" cried Savile, "you will not stand tamely by and allow us to be arrested for having demurred at the decision of an unjust judge! Such a freedom of speech has never yet been denied the meanest man in England."

"It is not for your speech, which is no more offensive to me than the hiss of a serpent I could crush beneath my heel," answered Wentworth sternly, "but for the insult you have offered the person of his sacred Majesty, in entering his Court with covered head. Apologise for this breach of propriety and you may protest against my acts until your jaws are weary."

"I would rather rot and die in the foulest dungeon you can thrust me into," answered Savile, furiously.

"And I!" added Bellasis.

"Take them away and keep them in confinement until they change their minds," said Wentworth, coldly.

And not until some months afterwards, when they did make apologies, and humble ones too, were they released.

Bellasis, who had committed the offence rather in a spirit of bravado than of malice, was from the first conscious of the impropriety of his conduct, and would have frankly made amends, but he would not desert his companion; and so held out until confinement had tamed Savile's malignant temper to humility.

Ethel had too well foreboded the breaking up of their family circle. Within a week after the arrival of his commission Wentworth had started upon his progress. The winter months dragged slowly on into the tardy spring, and June blossomed into unwilling summer, and still he was absent. A dreary dwelling was Woodhouse in the absence of its lord.

Lady Wentworth, who, with the exception of the week he had spent in London, had never been separated from her husband since her marriage, not even during his imprisonment, was most disconsolate, and had no happiness save in the perusal of his frequent letters; but even these were not all pleasant to her, for underneath their tenderness her loving

instinct could detect the air of weariness and despondency which comes of over-taxed energies and thwarted hopes.

Next to those dear letters the society of Ethel was her greatest solace, and her love for the young girl seemed to increase day by day. Ethel too had recovered much of her old cheerfulness of late.

It was the end of July before my Lord President returned to his home. The joy of their reunion was dashed to Lady Wentworth by the change which had taken place in him since their separation; he had grown thinner, a slight habitual stoop in the neck was greatly increased, as though by weakness, there were wrinkles upon his brow and lines of care upon his face, his health, never robust, was also affected. His loving partner beheld these signs with the deepest anxiety.

"Ah, my dear lord," she said, "why did not the King let you remain in your obscurity? you were happy then, now you are weighed down by cares and the enmity of wicked men."

But he always reproved such regrets, saying it was the duty of every loyal subject to sacrifice leisure, comfort, and even life, in the service of his sovereign.

CHAPTER III.

SUNDERED LIVES.

LAUNCELOT'S recovery from his wound had been more rapid than its severity seemed to warrant. And even during the period that Wentworth was at Court he had left his home and gone abroad—to recruit his health and improve his mind by foreign travel, it was given out; but those who knew anything of the secrets of Franklin Hall added that he had gone much against his will.

On the morning of his departure Ethel had found a piece of paper tied round a stone, which had been evidently thrown through the window, lying upon the floor of her chamber. She opened it and found these words written:

"Farewell, but only for a time."

She recognised the handwriting as Launcelot's, but she had received no other communication nor any news of him from that time.

In the month of August, 1629, Launcelot returned to England. On the very day on which he landed in London, in passing down the Strand, he encountered Godfrey Hornby. Remembering how warmly the soldier had espoused his quarrel with Savile, he was much pleased at this opportunity of renewing his acquaintance. The other met his advances with equal alacrity, and they dined together at a tavern.

Launcelot was much entertained by his companion's

conversation. He seemed to have travelled half over the world, was an acute observer, and gifted with no ordinary powers of mind, which had evidently been cultivated by an excellent education. Of himself he talked not at all, beyond intimating that he had been a soldier of fortune who had served under many masters, even the grand Turk ; yet there was something about him that irresistibly attracted young Franklin.

"Do you remain in London?" inquired Hornby, when they were separating.

"No, I return home, into Yorkshire."

"Indeed, I was thinking of taking that journey myself. Perhaps you would not object to having me for a travelling companion."

Launcelot answered that far from objecting he should like it above all things, as alone the journey would be terribly tedious.

And so the next morning, attended by Franklin's servant, they took the northern road ; and on the morning of the fourth day they crossed the boundaries which separate Derbyshire from its northern neighbour.

There were two roads that led to Franklin Hall, one, and the longer, swept round the confines of the Wentworth estate ; yet this was the way chosen by Launcelot.

"My journey is nearly over—and yours?" he inquired.

"Will end first; my destination is Wentworth-Woodhouse," replied Hornby.

"Indeed! But I remember now you spoke of having some acquaintance with Sir Thomas."

"Oh yes, we have known each other from boyhood ; we were friends once, but our careers since have been widely severed ; Fortune has smiled upon him, frowned upon me ; he is now my Lord President, I, an outcast."

He spoke with a sad bitterness that touched Launcelot's heart, yet he knew not how to shape his condolence into words.

"Not that I have aught to complain of ; he has befriended me more than once," Hornby went on, "and stood beside me in the hour of my most bitter affliction. And yet I like him not. That is ungrateful, you will say, and shows a bad heart

—possibly. But we have a natural repulsion for each other. Gratitude in the abstract idea has no existence; we never love people for the benefits they confer upon us, but we frequently dislike them from that cause; friendship, love, and hate, are the most illogical of passions, we like the men who wrong us, we love the women who scorn and betray us, we hate the friend who oppresses us with obligations. My heart never warmed towards Wentworth but once—when he so boldly attacked the Court and suffered its pains and penalties; since he has turned renegade, and become the obsequious instrument of despotism, it has frozen again. But,” he continued, suddenly changing the conversation, “the time of our parting is close at hand, and perhaps we shall never meet again.”

“I should be sorry to think so,” answered Launcelot earnestly, “for brief as our acquaintance has been I would not have it broken so abruptly.”

“Nor I, young sir; for I like you, and that is what I say to few men. But my humour is so capricious, my life so wayward, that ere another month I may be on my way to Virginia or Mexico, or fighting under the Great Mogul.”

They had now arrived at one of the entrances of Woodhouse Park. Launcelot paused and held out his hand.

“Here then we part,” he said.

The other grasped the proffered hand and held it in his clasp as he replied:

“If ever I can be of service to you, command me. If I am in England you may hear of me at the Spring Gardens, or at the Cock Tavern in Tothill Street, Westminster. Farewell, and good fortune attend you.”

And spurring his horse into a canter, he rode away towards the house, and was soon lost among the trees.

When he had gone Launcelot dismounted and gave his horse to his servant, and appointing a spot where he was to await him, signified his intention of walking homewards through the woods.

He knew that it was about the time Ethel took her morning walk, and he had a hope of meeting her.

It was just such a morning as that, now twelvemonths ago,

which had witnessed their last meeting, bright, warm, leafy ; there were the deer browsing in herds, the broad sheet of water at which they came to drink, there were the lights and shadows, the trees clothed in their dark green, not a leaf, not a blade of grass seemed to have changed since he last looked upon it.

He had not proceeded far when his heart gave a great leap, for he saw her whom he hoped to meet coming towards him, reading a book, and so intent upon it that she never once raised her head. He stood still, half sheltered by the trunk of a tree, that he might gaze his fill before she became conscious of his presence. A year had not passed without marking some changes upon her outward form ; it had rounded some of the girlish slightness into the firmer contour of womanhood ; she seemed slightly taller ; the face, as far as he could see from its position, was little altered, but of that he could judge better when it was raised.

On she came unto within a few yards of where he stood, then, that he might not break upon her too abruptly, he made a slight noise to attract her attention.

Thinking it was only some fawn or roe brushing through the grass, she carelessly raised her eyes, but stood rooted to the spot as they fell upon Launcelot Franklin.

"Have I frightened you ?" he said, running towards her, and taking her cold hand in his ; "I did not intend it ; I have been watching you for some minutes, but you were so intent upon your book you did not perceive me."

"Your appearance is indeed unexpected ; I thought you were abroad. When did you return ?"

After yielding her hand to his pressure for a moment, she withdrew it, and spoke in a tone in which she endeavoured to assume the unembarrassed cordiality of a mere acquaintance ; but the attempt was not particularly successful.

"I have only just returned," he answered ; "indeed I have not been to the Hall yet. I have sent my horse and servant round by the road. I have come through the park on foot, knowing it was the walking time of day with you, in the hope of this meeting."

"I trust you have enjoyed your travels, and have found improvement both in mind and health," she replied, making a weak attempt to stave off the subject she knew

was coming fast, her heart beating the while almost to bursting.

"It is just a year since we met," he said, not noticing her last speech; "what a gulf of time it has seemed to me looking back, and yet now I stand once more in your presence it seems but yesterday."

It was close upon her now; her evasions were exhausted, she could only turn away her head and make imaginary figures with her toe among the long grass.

"How often both in my sleeping and waking dreams have I beheld this scene!" he went on. "Hundreds of miles away, while I have been gazing upon some French or Italian landscape, it has risen before me so vividly that the reality seemed but a vision, the vision a reality."

There was a pause, and Ethel took advantage of it to make a desperate attempt at escape. "I am glad to see you back, Mr. Franklin," she said, "but I must leave you now, as I have already overstepped the time I promised Lady Wentworth to return."

"Give me but a few moments. I have returned to England only on your account; but for you I should perhaps never have set foot upon its shores again."

"Why do you renew a subject that is misery to both?" she answered appealingly. "Even had there been one vestige of hope when last we met, your father crushed it by his insults to my lord. All intercourse has been forbidden between us, and I am violating my lord's expressed desire in even giving you these few words."

He was turning away without a word, like a man who had heard his doom pronounced.

There was a despair in that silence that touched more than could the most eloquent words. She paused, gazed upon his pale face for a moment, then with eyes filled with tears, ran to him and seized both his hands.

"Oh Launcelot!" she exclaimed passionately, "why will you waste this great and precious love upon one who can never be aught to you, when there are so many women in the world, so infinitely better and fairer than I, women of spotless birth, whom it would make happy, who would cherish it as a great God gift? Upon me it falls like rain upon a sandy desert, leaving no sign, yielding no fruit."

"And you may as well ask the rain why it falls upon the sandy desert and leaves the fruitful land parching as ask a human heart why it loves ; love is a mystery which has no solution. I have been absent a year, and during that time I have never once heard from you or of you ; I have been in foreign lands where no object could remind me of you, and where every outward association was broken ; and yet you have been ever with me, growing dearer and dearer day by day, until my passionate longing to look upon you once more in the body and hear the accents of your voice could no longer be restrained, and so I came back."

She made no answer, for she could find none.

"You once told me," he resumed more calmly, "that you were proud of my love."

"And so I am," she answered, raising her eyes frankly to his. "My heart would indeed be cold and ungrateful did it not appreciate such pure devotion ; it bleeds for you."

"Have you heard aught from Sir Thomas respecting the—the secret, since I last saw you ?"

"My Lord Wentworth has been too deeply engaged in State affairs for me to presume to trouble him upon such a subject," she replied hastily.

"And yet he might see it is a canker preying upon your heart."

"He will doubtless tell me all in his own good time," she answered. "Until then I can wait patiently."

"And I, too, will wait patiently."

"And what if it be never told ?" she asked suddenly.

"We are young," he replied, "and *never* should be to us too far off for fear. Hope is the natural state of youth."

A deep sigh was her only answer as she turned away her troubled face.

"But I will detain you no longer," he continued, "for I see this interview is growing painful to you. It may be long before we meet again, but though it be years you may be as certain as that the sun will rise each morning that my heart is unchanged and still hopes."

He raised her hand to his lips, and held it for a moment in a lingering clasp ere he let it fall, and said, "Farewell."

Then, not daring to trust himself to another look, he hurried away.

Wrapping her face closely in her veil she sped in an opposite direction until she came to a little shady dell, and there, hidden from all fear of interruption, she lay down against the gnarled roots of a tree and wept.

CHAPTER IV.

LAUNCELOT'S HOME.

FRANKLIN HALL was a building of about the same period as Woodhouse, but was far inferior to it in size and architecture. It stood within high walls, and there was an air of gloom about its dark gray, ivy-covered stones that not even the bright August sun could disperse. The servants were clothed in dark, plain, uncouth garbs, which, however, well suited their long sanctimonious visages. They had no look or word of welcome to greet the return of their young master. As he was about to enter the dining-room where, the sound of voices told him, the family would be assembled, a gray-headed, sour-faced major-domo stopped him.

"Canst thou not hear," he said, "that that chosen servant of the Lord, Master Ezekiel Blatherwick, is expounding the word of God? You may hearken at the door, for, verily, when he uplifteth his voice it may be heard afar off, and let thy ears drink in the comforting words; but thou must not interrupt them."

Launcelot offered no expostulation, but cast himself upon a seat at the furthest extremity of the gloomy hall to wait the end of the homily. Even here the loud drone—which occasionally rose to fury—of the preacher's voice, and the greater portion of his words, could be distinctly heard; but in a few moments the young man had fallen into a reverie that rendered him unconscious of everything around,

until the old major-domo came and touched him upon the shoulder.

"I have told thy father thou art here, Master Launcelot, and he will see thee," he said.

Without making any reply Launcelot rose and walked into the room he had first approached.

It was a low-ceiled apartment, panelled with black oak, the furniture being of the same sombre material; two mullioned latticed windows, half-covered with ivy, admitted scarcely enough light, even on that sunny August day, to dissipate the darkness. No scrap of colour or ornament of any kind relieved the oppressive gloom. The occupants of this dreary abode well intoned with their surroundings.

Seated in an armchair beside one of the windows was an elderly man clothed in black, his hair, cut close to his head, was iron gray, so were his bushy eyebrows and moustache and beard, which were also cropped close; his face was gaunt, furrowed into deep wrinkles about the mouth and brow and bitter in expression. Opposite him sat a middle-aged woman, dressed in the severest Puritan style, with countenance to match.

At the head of the long table which traversed the middle of the floor, seated before a huge open Bible, was a tall bony man, with a low forehead, from which the hair was thrown back; light gray eyes, dull as a fish's, but, under the excitement of preaching, gleaming like a wolf's; a heavy jaw, coarse thick lips, and an enormous chin. This was the Reverend Ezekiel Blatherwick.

"Why have you returned without your father's permission?" was the mother's greeting, as he entered the room, and repulsing his proffered embrace.

"Because I was weary of being a wanderer in strange lands," he answered gently, "and longed to return home again."

"And why didst thou long to return home?" demanded Blatherwick.

Launcelot cast upon him a look of contempt, and was turning to his father, who had not yet given him even a sign of recognition, when the same deep nasal voice, whose tones were capable of drowning all others, again broke in.

"I will tell thee, young man, why thou didst long to

return—not for the godly company of thy parents, not because thou didst thirst for the precious words of truth which the Lord pours from the lips of me, His servant, as He did manna upon the hungering Israelites, but because thy eyes lusteth for a daughter of Pharaoh, yea, a child of Jezebel, who dwells in the tents of the enemies of the Lord and worships with the priests of Baal.”

“Father,” cried Launcelot, indignantly, “are you master here or this man?”

“Silence,” again answered the mother, “and do not dare insult a minister of the Lord, and our most precious friend, in my presence.”

“Thou shouldst not have come back, Launcelot, without permission, or at least without warning us of thy coming,” said Sir Richard, assuming a greater sternness than he felt.

“Methinks a son and an only son should scarcely need so much ceremony to return to his parents’ roof,” answered Launcelot bitterly.

“Thy words and tones are insolent, and thou dost seem to forget to whom thou art speaking. But thou wast ever stiff-necked, with a heart full of sinful pride.”

Once more it was the mother’s harsh voice that spoke.

And such was his welcome home.

Lady Franklin had always been hard and unloving to him, but never so cruel as this. This reception, however, he knew to be Blatherwick’s work. The Expounder had always been his covert enemy, for Launcelot had ever despised him and his exaggerated sanctimoniousness, which he felt convinced was only a cloak to hide hypocrisy.

He had not been home many hours before he could perceive that great as had been Blatherwick’s power in the household before he had departed, it had prodigiously increased during his absence—had, in fact, become absolute; a certain servility had formerly mingled in his manner towards the elder Franklins, but that had now wholly disappeared; his tone was peremptory, and the servants no longer looked to their master and mistress for direction, but to him.

When Launcelot found an opportunity of speaking to his father alone, he could not forbear remarking upon this change. But Sir Richard evaded the subject with an ill-concealed perturbation that rendered him yet more uneasy.

“This man,” he said, “is usurping all authority in your

house, he is estranging your hearts from everyone, and establishing a domination over your minds that will in time render you his slaves."

"Mr. Blatherwick is a pious and godly man, and we could not be in better hands. I will hear no word against him, nor does it become a son to dictate to his parents. Let me hear no more such words."

Sir Richard spoke with intense irritation, and walked away.

The next day he requested Launcelot to accompany him in a walk, as he had something of importance to communicate to him. After some conversation, in which he set forth that, although he, Launcelot, was an only son and would succeed to a good estate, yet he considered it wrong that a young man should pass his time in idleness, and therefore it would be as well he should enter himself as a student at one of the Inns of Court.

"Many godly men are to be found there," he said, "and such I trust you will make your companions, and avoid the lewd and the sinful that, alas, abound in such places."

Something of this kind had been mooted two or three years previously, but it had been afterwards abandoned. The revival of the idea had evidently taken place during the few hours since his return, in order to get him away again. It was, no doubt, the vicinity of Wentworth's ward that chiefly actuated this determination, but Launcelot could not help believing there was some other motive of which he was at present ignorant in this impatience to banish him from the paternal roof.

He offered no objection, however, to the scheme, for he could perceive that under any circumstances it would be impossible to remain at the Hall and endure the insolence of Blatherwick. Better, therefore, he should leave on good terms before the explosion—inevitable if he delayed his departure—could take place.

Two days afterwards he set out on his return journey to London.

His farewell had been scarcely more cordial than his greeting. His mother had allowed him to kiss her cheek, and had touched his forehead with her own icy lips, warning him at the same time against evil company, play-houses, and all vain pleasures. His father had grasped his

hand with something of cordiality, but tendered similar counsel. Blatherwick had threatened him with eternal perdition if he infringed these rules of life in the slightest degree, and had given him the name of "a house of prayer" presided over by a "dear brother in salvation," the Reverend Ishmael Wolf, under whose ministry he commanded him to place himself.

CHAPTER V.

DEATH.

AGAIN the summer days waned and passed away, the early frost of autumn changed the green to yellow and brown, falling leaves floated in the air and strewed the grass, and huddled in heaps out of the way of the driving blast; day by day the foliage grew thinner, until the icy wind had swept all away and latticed the gray sky with bare branches, and covered the world with a white mantle, and frozen up the waters, and the gloom of winter was upon all.

And as time went on, all things, animate and inanimate, looked longingly for the reawakening of Nature, when she should cast off her pall of cloud and frost, and rise fresher and more lovely from her long sleep. The brook was weary of its icy fetters and longed to skip over the stones in the bright sunlight; the flowers longed to rise out of the darkness of the earth into the living air; the birds, shivering in their nests, dreamed of blue skies and coned over their hymns of thanksgiving; the wild animals in their lairs were waiting for the greenery of grass and leaves; and man, whether in hut or castle, cottage or palace, town or country, looked out wearily upon the deadness and desolation of the earth; all, all were praying and longing for the coming of the great sun-god, glorious Apollo, in his robe of azure and chariot of fire. More than once the snow and the ice melted into the soddened earth, but only to again close over

it. Then at last came dim harbingers of the coming glory, gleams of brightness, transient breathing from the south, enticing the young shrubs to put forth their tender shoots—to be nipped by the cruel east wind. But the old trees, who had grown wary of such deceitful cooings, as yet showed no signs. Snowdrops and pale primroses peeped out timidly from the hedges, and spring was coming at last. But ere the leaves and the blossoms came many an eye that had watched for the sweet green and white would be closed in death, and the dewy grass that might have been pressed beneath their feet would wave above their heads.

During these winter months a new anxiety had fallen upon Wentworth, beyond and even greater than the many which his political elevation had brought with it. A cold, caught in the latter part of the autumn, had prostrated his wife upon a sick-bed during several weeks. When she arose from it she was but a shadow of her former self; her majestic and splendidly-proportioned figure had fallen away to attenuation, her bright complexion had faded to wanness; her gay spirits had drooped to dejection, and she had become a feeble, nerveless invalid.

Every moment that he could snatch from his all-engrossing labours was passed beside her bed; never was husband more devoted, never was wife more grateful. But there was another whose devotion even exceeded his, not because of greater love, for that was impossible, but because she could make her tendance the sole duty and pleasure of her life. Ethel was indeed a ministering angel to her dear lady; ever beside her, anticipating her every wish, soothing her pain, cheering her despondency. Lady Wentworth had always loved her very dearly, but that feeling was now increased a hundred-fold. She could not endure her an instant from her sight, and would take neither physic nor food from any other hand. She frequently reproached herself with being so exacting when she saw the young girl grow thin and pale with constant watching, and begged her to take rest! but Ethel would not hear of any one, except it were Wentworth, taking her place, and showed so much distress at the proposition that they were fain to give up their persuasions.

The first time my lady left her chamber was on a bright mild day at the end of March. Leaning on her husband's shoulder, supported by his strong arm, that carried rather

than assisted her down the wide oaken staircase ; she was led into the great dining-hall, and, breathless and exhausted even with that small exertion, seated in the deep recess of one of the windows. On one side sat Wentworth, on the other knelt her dear Ethel, each holding a hand, and at her knee stood her two young children.

It was one of those genial sunny days of early spring, when the bare leafless branches look such strange anomalies, when winter and summer seem to meet face to face. Through the blue profound the sun shot rays of dazzling fire, a few white clouds deepened the ultramarine of the sky, which seemed an illimitable distance above them ; the air was like draughts of pure oxygen and quickened the pulses with a new and more intense life. A gentle shower had just sprinkled the grass and the shrubs with myriads of drops that flashed like diamonds in the sun-rays. Never does the soul of man cling so intensely to earth as when gazing upon these first awakenings of Nature from her long sleep, for he can dream of no fairer Heaven. To fade away with the leaf, to die with the loveliness of the year and sink into the earth with all that is beautiful, strips death of something of its bitterness ; but to fall into the dark grave when all things are springing into life and light ; to see all Nature so strong, so joyous ; to think of the golden days and purple nights of summer, the songs of the birds, the scent of the flowers, and to know that for you these things can never be again ; ah ! then, indeed, Death is terrible.

It was such thoughts that dimmed Lady Wentworth's eyes as she sat gazing through the window upon the bright landscape below, for there had come upon her one of those forebodings, often vouchsafed to us as we are drifting towards eternity, that she would never look upon those great trees in leaf again, never again see their dark shadows trembling in the wind, growing longer and longer upon the green sward as she had watched them for many a listless hour ; that she would never again see the sunbeams make golden traceries through their embowering branches upon the yellow moss, that she would never again rest beneath their shade in the hot July days and listen dreamily to the trickling of the waters and the hum of the bees ; that she would never again wander among their mazes in the summer moonlight leaning upon the arm of her dear lord ; she felt that all these things had

passed away for ever, and were only memories of a life that was fading, fading, fading slowly into oblivion.

With much ado did she restrain herself from crying out, from casting herself upon her husband's breast, from sobbing prayers to the Inexorable to spare her but a few years longer—ay, even one year—so that she might for once take in the full joy and blessing of these things, of which she had thought so little in her days of health and strength. There was not the commonest sight or sound of summer-tide that did not rise upon her imagination at this moment, that was not invested with delight, that was not a precious thing that wrung her heart to part with, for to all was the terrible refrain "Nevermore." Then came the thought of husband, children, friends gathered upon the shore, and she drifting away with outstretched hands upon the dark ocean—whither? She hid her tears among her children's hair, as she stooped over their heads and caressed them, and then turned a smiling face towards Wentworth and talked with him almost cheerfully of what they would do when she was strong and well again.

For a few days, while the weather continued mild, she rallied a little and seemed even to gain strength; but after that there came a cruel north-east wind and a fall of snow, and she relapsed. Day after day the physician, who had been brought from York to live in the house, looked graver. His skill, he told Wentworth, was exhausted, and Nature alone must be trusted to for a favourable change.

It would have been a wonderful sight to those who knew him only as the stern haughty Lord President, a man of iron, all brain and no heart, to have seen him in his chamber that night, when all were at rest, prostrate upon the ground in the agony of his grief, weeping and sobbing as only strong men can weep and sob. But when he issued forth next morning there was no trace of that tempest upon his face, which though pale looked even prouder and calmer than usual, as though defying Fate to subdue him.

As April advanced the weather again became genial; but the poor lady grew worse, and even the most sanguine felt they were hoping against hope. No word of the dread parting had as yet been exchanged between husband and wife, but each could read the other's thoughts, knew that the revelation had come to both.

At last there came a time when the word could be held back no longer, lest it should never be spoken. And as she had lain thinking during the long days and the sleepless nights upon the future of those dear ones, in which she was to have no share, there had grown up in her mind a certain thought. Its first suggestion had seemed so impossible that she had at once endeavoured to banish it; but it would come back spite of her, and familiarity smoothed away many of its difficulties and gave it shape and likelihood.

One day she requested to be left alone with her husband; all knew what that request meant, and left the chamber with tearful eyes and sinking hearts; he knew too their talk was to be of *Death*, and called up all his fortitude to sustain him.

He sat down beside her and took hold of her hand, which he could feel tremble. There was a solemn silence for several moments; she was the first to break it.

"My dear lord," she began, in her low, sweet voice, "I can feel that my time on earth is now very, very brief; you know it as well as I, though you have not dared to speak it. You have ever been to me the tenderest and dearest of husbands, and if God had but let us grow old together—but we must not rebel against His will. You are still young—in the very prime of life, our children are scarcely more than infants; when I am gone——there must be——another to——take my place to you and them."

"Arabella!" he burst forth, unable any longer to keep back the tears which were suffocating him.

"Such a thought was very dreadful to me at first," she went on, putting her arm round his neck and drawing his head down upon the pillow beside her, "that you should ever be to another what you have been to me; but it would be wrong and selfish to desire that henceforth you should go through life solitary and unloved, and that my children should be given over to hirelings when they might have a mother's love."

"Oh, hush, hush, I cannot endure to think of these things," he moaned, his face buried in the pillow.

"Do not give way, dearest," she said soothingly, "but hear me patiently to the end, for I have something of importance to say to you. If I could be assured that that

other, who is to take my place, would love and cherish you as I have done, knowing all the rare nobleness and goodness of your soul—if I could be assured that she would love and cherish my children in her inmost heart as though she were indeed their mother, I could pass away almost happy.”

She paused for a moment, and then added in a yet lower voice, “I know such a one.”

Wentworth started up and looked at her aghast.

“Can you not guess whom I mean?”

He shook his head without speaking, but a strange expression was coming into his white, tear-stained face.

“Ethel!”

“Heavens!”

“You alone can solve the possibility of my desire, for you alone know whether it lies within the possibility of accomplishment. When you brought me home I found her here, a mere child, I asked you who she was, you answered that she was an orphan whom you had taken under your care, but that you were not at liberty to tell me aught concerning her as you were bound by a pledge of secrecy. I asked no further questions, having no right to do so. From that hour I loved Ethel, and since then she has been to me the dearest sister, ever ready to sacrifice herself to my lightest wish. The wife of my Lord Wentworth, so that she can do honour to him by her beauty and her virtues, needs no quarterings, for his greatness and nobility are enough for both. The descendant of John of Gaunt, with a lineage even higher than that of the Stuarts, and the favourite of the King, can condescend to stoop for happiness. Therefore if there be no bar, no shame attached to such a marriage, it would be my dearest wish.”

He sat listening to her with head averted and bent down upon his chest.

“But, Ethel, it would seem, has given her heart to this young Franklin,” he said, after a long silence.

“No, I am convinced she does not love him. I have probed her heart. There is but one image there, and *that is yours.*”

He lifted his eyes with a startled look in them, but she was too exhausted to speak again.

The next morning they had another interview alone, in which he rendered her many explanations and made certain

promises, the result of which will be disclosed hereafter. From that time she grew more resigned. But the constant wasting of her strength warned him that the end was close at hand, and that her father and brothers must be sent for with all speed, if they were ever again to meet her in life.

One bright April evening there was gathered around her bed a group of all dearest to her on earth ; they had been summoned to take their last farewell. When the sad parting was over, and she had pressed her last kiss upon the faces of her sobbing children, who, though too young to understand the solemn meaning of the scene wept in sympathy, she requested by signs, for speech was already dead, to be left alone with her dear lord.

Cold and motionless as a statue, with pallid, rigid face, in which there was no expression, save in those caverns of despair, the hollow eyes, Wentworth was in his old place beside her, holding her thin white hand.

The westering sun was shedding upon her a flood of red light, for it was her desire that all the curtains should be drawn back that she might gaze upon its effulgence for the last time. Slowly the brightness faded, and as the last ruby flush sank into the grayness of the evening, she uttered a low sigh and passed away.

When friends hurried back to his summons they found him frantically kissing the dead face and calling upon the dead name.

"God hath taken from me," he cried, "the noblest, most incomparable wife and woman my eyes shall ever behold."

Book IV.—The Murmurs of the Tempest.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE SPRING GARDEN.

At the north-west extremity of the grounds of Whitehall Palace, that now form St. James's Park, there was, in 1630, a place of resort which, on account of a spring that rose there, was called Spring Garden. The spot still retains the old name—it was pluralised by a rival place of entertainment being opened near it—although bricks and mortar and paving-stones have long since swallowed up trees and greensward.

Although used, however, as a public garden, being a portion of the royal demesne, it was public only by sufferance. At the period of which we write, it was one of the most fashionable resorts of London throughout the summer months, and had been occasionally honoured by the presence of the King himself and the Duke of Buckingham. This very year (1630) his Majesty had, by royal patent, established a bowling-green in these grounds; there was also an ordinary, the high price of which—six shillings—kept it exclusive to the gentry.

Hither, in the summer evenings, came the young gentlemen of the Court to play at bowls, and drink wine under the shadows of the trees; and hither came ladies, sometimes of the Court, sometimes of the street, to meet their gallants.

its secluded walks and bowers rendering it especially desirable for such assignations. Although within the precincts of the palace, it was the scene of frequent brawls ; no place, however, was sacred from the sword in those days of duelling.

It was a warm, bright evening in June, and the Garden presented a brilliant and animated scene. Groups of both sexes were gathered round the many tables, or watched the bowlers ; every now and then loving couples disappeared among, or emerged from, the shadowy walks ; the whole air was filled with loud laughter, the buzz of conversation, and the cries of hurrying waiters, who could scarcely supply the wants of the numerous guests.

Seated at one of the tables drinking wine were two gentlemen who need no introduction, since they are already known to the reader. The elder of the two was Godfrey Hornby, the younger, Launcelot Franklin. Soon after his return to London Launcelot had sought out his quondam second at the addresses he had given him, one of which, it will probably be remembered, was the very place at which we now find them. The mutual liking, that each had conceived for the other upon the renewal of their acquaintance, was still further increased by frequent intercourse, and Hornby soon established a marked influence over the mind of his young friend, who made him his confidant and adviser.

“And so you have had a letter from home this morning?” observed Hornby.

“Yes,” replied Launcelot, absently.

“No bad news, I trust?”

“No.”

“And yet you seemed troubled.”

“I confess it,” replied Launcelot, frankly. “And yet it is the tone of the letter rather than its contents that troubles me. My father writes constrainedly, uneasily, as though he were holding back something he wished to say. He does not like me to be from home ; of that I am sure. His letters are all filled with warnings against the pitfalls which the world prepares for unwary youth, and I can read between the lines as plainly as though his pen had traced it there—‘It is sore against my will you are exposed to such temptations.’”

"Why then did he banish you from home?"

"That I cannot fathom: though cold and stern in his demeanour he has given me many indications of affection; but for my mother——"

"I understand," interposed Hornby. "That is strange; the mother is usually the loving and indulgent parent."

"She is not my own mother."

"No?"

"But she is the only one I can remember."

"And was she always as stern and puritanical as now?"

"Always. My father, I should imagine, from words let fall at times, led a wild life in his youth. He succeeded his maternal uncle to the Franklin Estate, and, in order that the old name might not die out, he——"

Here Launcelot's confidences were interrupted by a gaily-dressed young gentleman coming up to the table and holding out his hand.

It was Mr. Bellasis, who had been Savile's second in the duel. Launcelot had met him a few weeks back at one of the theatres. Bellasis immediately recognised him, came over to his seat, and in a frank hearty manner apologised for his former rudeness and that of his friend.

"I have felt ever since heartily ashamed of myself for what passed that day," he said, "and have long wished for an opportunity to tell you as much."

Launcelot received his excuses in the same generous spirit in which they were tendered. They had met several times since on very friendly terms.

"I have a friend here who is anxious to follow my example and cry *peccavi* for the past," said Bellasis.

Launcelot's eyes turning in the direction he pointed, fell upon the saturnine face of John Savile.

Bellasis brought him to the table saying:

"There is Mr. Franklin; now you can do the rest yourself."

"Oh! I have not forgotten the gentleman," replied Savile, endeavouring to assume a jocular manner which sat very ill upon him; "he left me a memento I kept some time. However, we should never hold malice for a sword-thrust given in fair fight; and if Mr. Franklin is of my mind, there's my hand, and I hope we shall be good friends for the future."

Launcelot liked neither the man nor his words and manner; both were repulsive and anything but apologetic; yet it would have been churlish to have rejected his advances; so he took the proffered hand, but could scarcely restrain a shudder at the cold clammy touch which returned no pressure to his own. Their eyes met. Savile's sought the ground, not before Launcelot thought he had read there treachery and deceit.

"Surely I know that face," cried Bellasis, looking towards Hornby, who had been a silent but watchful spectator of this scene.

"You ought to," answered the soldier, grimly, "and for the same reason your friend there remembers Mr. Franklin."

"What, my old opponent!" cried Bellasis, grasping his hand, "I am glad to meet thee; I always like a man I have fought with, it gives a wonderful zest to friendship. You will remember him, Savile?"

"Oh yes," replied the other, indifferently, but without even looking at the person indicated.

"And now let us have a bottle of good Burgundy to seal the reconciliation," cried Bellasis, jovially.

"Of course you have heard the news from Yorkshire?" he resumed, when they were all seated, and had pledged each other in the generous liquor.

"No; what news?" inquired Launcelot, anxiously.

"Know you not Lady Wentworth is dead?"

"Lady Wentworth dead!"

"Indeed! is this true?" cried Hornby.

"She has been dead these two months; why, it has been well known at Whitehall for several weeks; it was published in the *Certain News* and the *London Courant*."

"You have given me a great shock," said Launcelot; "she was a gentle, noble lady, for whom I had the profoundest respect. And where is Lord Wentworth, and—the rest of the household?"

"He has remained at Woodhouse ever since in the most strict retirement, save in as far as he is compelled to appear abroad for the despatch of his duties. One of his sisters has undertaken the care of his household, in which, I believe, there is no further alteration; at least, so Savile informs me, and he has just come from home."

"Mistress Ethel is still at Woodhouse," said Savile, in a tone which made Launcelot's colour rise.

"Strange I should not have heard of this," muttered Hornby, thoughtfully.

"It must be a great blow to my Lord Wentworth for he loved her very dearly," observed Franklin.

"It has struck home," replied Savile, exultingly; "I saw him a few days back; he has aged ten years since I last saw him. My Lord President cannot, with all his mightiness, keep Death from his door; he will feel the hatred his tyranny and oppression have worked all the more keenly for this."

"It is scarcely the time to call up a man's faults when he is stricken down by affliction," said Launcelot.

"Franklin is right," observed Bellasis; "I hate Wentworth and his tyranny as much as you do, but yet I pity him in this."

Savile made a movement of impatience. "Pity him!" he said, savagely; "much pity he had for you in your prison at York!"

"You know my opinion upon that business, and as we do not agree upon the subject do not let us renew it," responded Bellasis.

"The people clamoured against Buckingham," resumed Savile, making no reply to his companion's last remark, "but they have found a worse in this black renegade."

"Hardly," rejoined Hornby, dryly; "and Wentworth is a man of far higher abilities than Buckingham."

"He has not shown them as yet," sneered Savile. "Was England ever so degraded as at this time? What say you to this shameful peace with France and Spain, and our reverses at La Rochelle? And the Court is going to celebrate our degradation, forsooth, by a masque which it is said will eclipse in splendour all that have gone before!"

"Our defeat at La Rochelle," answered Hornby, "was a legacy bequeathed us by Buckingham's incapacity, and the dissensions at home have compelled the King to make a peace when he might have humbled the power of Spain and France and rendered us superior to both. Mark me," he continued, "I am not defending the Court, for my sympathies are all the other way, but I would be just to the devil him-

self, and it is not justice to King or Ministers to refuse the sinews of war and then growl at peace."

"Yet had the just demands of the Commons been yielded supplies would have been readily granted," observed Launcelot.

"Have you heard of Laud's last piece of gallimaufrey at the consecration of St. Giles's-in-the Fields?" interposed Bellasis, "his cursings, and blessings, and howlings, and bowings to the east, and over the bread and wine? There never was anything savoured more of Popery in bloody Mary's time. We shall have the Smithfield fires lighted again if this goes on much further."

"I heard an account of what he did at St. Catherine's, and this I suppose is but a repetition," rejoined Launcelot. "And in this lies a greater danger to the Court than even in tonnage and poundage and government without Parliament, for there is so deeply-rooted a horror of Papacy and Arminianism among the people that they would stop at no violence to crush them."

"For my part I care little for creeds," interposed Hornby; "I have lived among them all, and found them each and all much alike, equally intolerant and every man equally ready to burn and massacre everybody else who differed from him, and all equally removed from the true spirit of Christianity. But I know what a mighty power is wielded by these creeds, and that men will grow more furious and unmanageable over an idea than over the bitterest real injury you can inflict upon them. Everywhere I hear murmurs of discontent and whispers of disaffection."

"And the murmurs and whispers are often loud enough to fall upon royal ears somewhat harshly," observed Savile.

At that moment two ladies wrapped in long dark cloaks and wearing masks which entirely concealed their features, walked slowly past the table at which the four were seated. Savile and Bellasis exchanged glances and rose.

"Pardon our scant courtesy in leaving you so abruptly," said the latter; "but," he added, with a smile, and pointing to the direction the ladies had taken, "I need not say more."

"You had best beware of Mr. John Savile," remarked Hornby, when they had gone; "he has not forgiven you the

sword-thrust, and would yet like to revenge himself for it. I like him not."

"Nor I," replied Launcelot, absently, for his thoughts were elsewhere.

"I am sorry to hear of Lady Wentworth's death," observed Hornby, after a silence; "I never saw the lady but once, but I have heard her well spoken of."

"No praise could have surpassed her merit," replied Launcelot, warmly; "she was a most gentle and noble lady. What a grief her death must be to Ethel, who loved her devotedly! There will be a great change in Ethel's position at Woodhouse."

"Ay," ejaculated Hornby, thoughtfully.

"I trust the new mistress, my lord's sister, will treat her kindly. Would I could see her. I have half resolved to take a journey into Yorkshire."

"Do not think of it," interposed Hornby, quickly; "Wentworth will care for her, and see no wrong is done her, you may be satisfied of *that*. As for yourself, if the wench really loves you nothing will be gained by thrusting yourself upon her. She acts nobly in holding you off while a mystery hangs over her name and birth! But"—changing his tone to one of earnestness—"were your importunities at last to be victorious over her better sense, and then when you had reached your paradise you suddenly discovered that you had married some child of shame, what then?"

"The sin of her parents could not diminish her virtues one jot in my eyes; her own purity would make amends for all. If the world approved not my choice, why, we would quit it and make a world of our own, or go to some foreign land where none would know our name or story."

"That would be to crush all the bright talents of your youth; it would be a living death."

"No; it would be to me the happiest of lives. It would give me what the struggles, turmoils, and ambitions of the world never gave any man yet—content."

"We have all had such dreams," answered Hornby, cynically; "happy are those who have never tried to realise them. Action, struggle, turmoil, are the natural elements of the young and lusty; there is a joy even in the miseries they entail for which no mere tortoise life can ever compensate. For a time you might find this love sufficient to fill heart and brain; but

the mind of man changes like his body, with years; romance fades with youth, and ambition of some kind, whether it be of wealth or distinction, takes its place; if that ambition be barred and hopeless man's life crumbles into dust and ashes. So it would be with you, for you are one of the men of the new ideas that will ere long shake this land like an earthquake, unless a Richelieu rises to crush them as he has in France; but he will have a tougher task than the French Cardinal, for Englishmen are more difficult to subdue. You, bury yourself in a library or laboratory—you, who, apart from your love-sickness, are all fire and enthusiasm, dreaming of revolutions that even startle me! Pshaw, young man! I know you better than you know yourself."

Launcelot made no answer, but seemed plunged in gloomy thought.

Hornby watched him for several minutes, until a softened expression stole over his rugged features.

"Forgive me," he said, presently, stretching out his hand, "if I have roughly brushed off some of the bloom of romance, it is a cruel kindness for which thou wilt thank me one day, perhaps when my bones are mouldering under the sod of some bloody battle-field. I, too, have had my romance; all men with hearts in their bodies have; I, too, have loved, strange as it may sound, as passionately as you, a woman as beautiful, and seemingly as good; like you I would have staked my life upon her truth; like you I believed that all the blessings of earth were garnered in her possession. We were married; at the end of two years she left me, fled with a man I had called my friend, and destroyed my peace and my honour for ever. I sold my estate, went abroad, changed my name, entered the Spanish army as a man-at-arms, gave out a report of my death, and did not return to England for fifteen years—that is to say about the time we first met. I was too much altered to be recognised by any of my old associates, and so I am like the dead come back among the living, and shall be so evermore until I meet that man and that woman."

There was a world of intensity and suppressed passion in the way he told this story, revealing the hidden fires which glowed beneath his thin surface of cynicism, that seized upon Launcelot's attention and aroused his interest.

"Are they still living?" he inquired.

"If they are not, I shall doubt the justice of God," he answered, fiercely. "But they have baffled my search as yet. Think over my story, it may more closely resemble your own than appears to you at first sight."

"It is a very sad one," said Launcelot.

"But a very common one," replied Hornby.

Both felt that these confidences had knit them together by a new tie.

The sun had sunk and night was coming on; the bowlers had left off their game, the revelry at the tables was growing noisier and couples were pairing off more frequently beneath the shadows of the trees. Suddenly our two companions were aroused by a shout of loud laughter followed by angry voices, and then the clash of swords.

In the centre of an open space there was placed a sun-dial, beneath which rose the spring that gave the Garden its name; in connection with this was a number of small pipes that could be converted into a *jet d'eau* by means of a wheel worked at some distance off. It was a favourite sport with the frequenters of the grounds to gather a group of strangers round the sun-dial and despatch a man to work the wheel; the effect of this was to send up a sudden shower and drench the bystanders with water.

It was this jest that had caused the laughter; but the victims resented it by drawing their swords and attacking their scoffers. A general *mêlée* was the consequence.

"We had best be gone," said Hornby, rising; "we shall have the guard here directly, and they will arrest all they can lay hands upon whether they are concerned in the brawl or not."

As they were making for the gate they were met by Bellasis who was hurrying towards the brawl.

"What is it?" he inquired, eagerly; "if it's fighting I must be there. Come, Savile," he cried, drawing his sword, "let us join in the sport."

Without looking round to see if his friend were following he plunged into the thickest of the crowd.

"Brave Master Savile is a true comrade, is not he?" said Hornby, pointing in the direction they were taking.

Launcelot, turning his head, saw Savile hurrying through the gate.

"When shall we meet again?" he asked.

“Soon, I hope,” replied Hornby.

“Well, you know where to find me, although I know not your lodging,” said Launcelot, smiling.

“I am too much of a soldier to pitch my tent for long in one place, neither are my quarters always reputable enough to receive respectable company. Adieu.”

And they parted.

CHAPTER II.

IN COUNCIL.

A FEW mornings afterwards the King held Court and Council at St. James's Palace. It was a bright sunny day and numerous groups of idlers were congregated between that and Whitehall, but scarcely in numbers sufficient to form a crowd, for state pageantry was then too common to attract much curiosity. The space upon which Pall Mall and the whole neighbourhood of St. James's now stand was then open country; the southern side was bounded by a wall enclosing the palace grounds. Houses were not erected upon the site until some years later; a broad, well-kept roadway, shaded by trees, led from the Strand to the palace, and to the north of this all was field and hedge, dotted here and there with farms, and cottages, and haystacks, giving an uninterrupted view right away to the north-western heights, then miles distant from the metropolis.

About twelve o'clock carriages, sedans, and equestrians began a continuoss stream from east to west, for St. James's was the western *ultima thule* beyond which there was no more London. Just as the cavalcade was at its thickest three gentlemen came strolling across the fields and stopped beneath one of the trees to cool themselves, for the morning was very hot, and to watch the passers-by.

The prancing and magnificently-caparisoned horses, the gilded equipages and liveries, the splendid dresses of the ladies and gentlemen—all velvets, satins, ribbons, laces,

feathers, gold, and jewels—rendered it a striking sight. It did not, however, appear to impress the bystanders, who looked on with sullen faces, and who had a disparaging remark for nearly everyone who passed, mingled at times with murmurs and even low groans. These marks of disfavour were received by the elder courtiers with cold contempt; by the younger with bitter scorn and ironical smiles, several even taking off their hats and bowing in acknowledgment.

“Those gilded popinjays bear it bravely with their scoffing,” observed one of the three pedestrians, who was no other than Mr. Pym. “But they will have to lick the dust for their insolence one day.”

“There goes my Lord Keeper Coventry,” remarked one of his companions, pointing to a grave-looking man on horseback, who seemed so far popular with the mob that they displayed no hostility towards him.

“Not the worst among the bad,” observed Pym, “had he a little more boldness; but he clings to old abuses, and makes no effort to check growing evils.”

A faint cheer that died in its birth, as though its utterers were ashamed of having been betrayed into any manifestation except one of discontent, hailed the approach of an elderly man with a rather pleasing countenance.

“O ho! my Lord Privy Seal and newly-made Earl of Manchester is in favour to-day!” cried Pym ironically; “how little virtue must be left among our rulers when such as he can find approval!”

“He is at least a staunch Protestant!” remarked the one who had spoken before.

“But a gross peculator who robs the State to enrich himself,” answered Pym savagely.

Another sound from the crowd—this time of murmurs mingled with groans—suspended his speech and turned his eyes upon a pompous, yet nervous-looking gentleman, who seemed much disturbed by his reception. This was the Earl of Portland, Lord Treasurer. The next personage who attracted notice created considerable commotion. By those whose garb proclaimed them to be of the Puritan order he was greeted with every demonstration of hatred, and those who did not hiss or groan, scowled upon him with a malignancy even more significant; a few endeavoured to raise a loud cheer, but it was speedily put down. This personage

was the celebrated Laud, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, at that time Bishop of London.

The sight of this man seemed to lash Pym to fury. "Look at the herald of Antichrist!" he cried; "the Papist Arminian! the spy of Rome! and close behind him a fitting companion, the renegade Wentworth! Hark at the idiots! they actually cheer him, as if he had not betrayed them!"

Wentworth's sombre costume of rich black velvet, destitute of all ornament, and relieved only by the falling lace collar, his broad-flapped black hat with one drooping feather, set off to great advantage his commanding figure and haughty features, and at once attracted every glance. Grief had hollowed his sallow cheek and eagle eyes, but it had imparted a sterner and more indomitable expression to the proud face, as though defying fate to crush him more. Many recognised him as the orator who had so passionately denounced the tyrannies of Buckingham, and had heard only vaguely, or not at all, of his desertion of the popular cause. So little was then known southward of the doings north of the Trent, that his Presidentship was as much a myth as the Government of the King of Muscovy. So loudly had Pym uttered his last words that they reached Wentworth's ears above the beat of the horse's hoofs. He turned his head: it was not difficult to discover that tall heavy figure thrust purposely forward. The eyes of the two men met in a steady stare; those of the first burned with a malignant hatred; Wentworth's face moved not a muscle; calm and unmoved he met the fierce gaze and passed on. A few of the bystanders who had heard Pym's words began to groan, but they found no followers.

After Wentworth came another stream of horsemen and equipages, which excited little beyond sour looks of discontent and disparaging remarks spoken by one neighbour to another until the appearance of a body of the Yeomen of the Guard announced the approach of the King. Mounted pages and attendants splendidly attired preceded the royal carriage, at the open windows of which the King and Queen could be distinctly seen.

There was a great commotion amongst the crowd, which had by this time considerably increased; a few loyal subjects tried to raise a cheer; but, as in former attempts, it was put

down, almost by violence, by some of the more hostile of the mob.

"Give us a Parliament! we will not be taxed without!" cried a voice. "Send Laud to Rome," cried a second, while some half-dozen others joined in a cry of "Down with the Papists and Arminians!"

"Behold a new Ahab and Jezebel," cried a sour-looking Puritan; "the arm of the Lord of Israel is not less powerful now than it was in the days of old, and it will smite them—yea level their pride and wickedness in the dust."

"Look at the French Papist woman," exclaimed another, "see how scornfully the scarlet——"

Ere the speaker could finish his phrase a fiery-looking youth, who had spurred forward his horse, struck him a sharp blow with the flat of his sword.

A howl rose from the mob, and many made a movement to attack the *cortège*, but the more peaceable, which formed the larger number, fell back; the procession stopped, the gentlemen drew their swords, the yeomen grasped their halberds more firmly.

"Are you all mad?" cried Pym to those about him; "would you stir up a silly riot out of which you would bring nothing but broken heads? Besides, the fellow would have deserved his punishment had he been cut down for daring to apply such an epithet to any woman, much less to the Queen of England!"

As these words were passed rapidly from mouth to mouth, there rose a murmur of applause from all save the Puritan faction.

The King had regarded the whole scene calm and unmoved; but his consort could not repress her passionate indignation at the threatening words and murmurs and scowling faces that everywhere met her ears and eyes; her countenance flushed and quivered with scorn and defiance. She commanded one of the attendants who rode beside the carriage to bring forward the young gentleman who had struck her calumniator.

"Reserve your thanks and favour, and neither shall be lacking, for a more private opportunity," said Charles; "it is useless to irritate these men."

"Not so, my lord," answered the Queen, her eyes flashing fire; "it shall never be said the daughter of

Henri Quatre feared to thank the defender of her honour because she was surrounded by traitors and base *canaille*."

Charles sighed and fell back, while his consort, the carriage-door being opened, extended her hand to the young cavalier to kiss, and thanked him loudly and volubly for his gallant service.

When the royal *cortège* had passed beneath that sombre brick gateway which still faces the lounge down St. James's Street, the mob scattered about the roadway, and loudly and angrily discussed the late events.

The reception was to have preceded the Council ; but so great and passionate was the Queen's excitement, that she insisted upon the order being reversed, and Charles, as usual, gave way to her.

The chamber in which the Council was held was one of the oldest of the palace, the walls were covered with tapestry, and over the fireplace were carved the initials "H.A." entwined together by a true-lover's knot, a reminiscence of the days of Henry VIII. and Anne Boleyn, and beside these were the arms of England and France, and the white rose of Lancaster.

At the head of the table, upon a raised dais, sat the King : now leaning upon the arm of his chair, now moving restlessly about, was the Queen. On one side his Majesty stood the Lord President Wentworth, on the other the Lord Treasurer Weston, Earl of Portland ; there were besides, Sir Thomas Coventry, the Earl of Manchester, the Earls of Pembroke, Montgomery, Dorset, Bishop Laud, and others of less note.

The King looked pale and disturbed. He was speaking :

"Of what should these people complain? Never has this country of England been so prosperous before—not even in the days of Queen Elizabeth ; commerce and wealth increase daily, and we encourage art and manufacture far beyond the means allowed us. But there shall be no more Parliaments ; these insolent traitors shall beard us no more ; we will use the power which God has confided to our discretion, not unjustly nor tyrannically, but with a due regard to our own honour and dignity, and the needs of our kingdom. Neither will we make any more concessions, for they do but encourage malcontents to wax stronger in insolence."

"You have conceded too much already, my lord," burst forth the Queen; "you have given way before these clamours until you are no longer a king. You let them drive away my faithful French from me, the only friends I ever had in this miserable country, even my confessor; it was from this very window I saw them, *les pauvres*, go weeping,"—and her Majesty might have added, it was one of the panes of that window she had broken in her rage and grief at the sight. I told you then you would repent yielding so much to these *misérables*. Ah! *mon Dieu*, if these *scélérats* had so insulted a daughter of France in Paris they would have been broken on the wheel, but here they are let go free to laugh, and to do it again the next time I stir abroad."

The King, who looked annoyed at this outburst, spoke a few words to her in her own tongue, but too low to be heard by those about him, who purposely turned away their heads.

"Ah! thus it is ever!" she cried, irritably. "I must restrain myself—I must not complain! I, a queen, must endure insult, and humble myself to these *brigands*, this *racaille*. Ah, *ma belle France*! why did I ever leave you for this miserable country?"

There were tears in her eyes and voice as she uttered these last words—a sight that Charles's heart could never resist. He kissed her hand, speaking terms of endearment, after which she went away and stood at one of the windows.

This scene excited little attention among the Ministers, who had frequently witnessed similar ones.

When Henrietta Maria had retired, the King turned to Wentworth, who had arrived in London only the previous night.

"My lord," he said, holding out his hand, "ere we proceed to State matters, let me express my condolence at your heavy affliction. I have felt for you deeply."

"I thank your Majesty," replied Wentworth, greatly affected. "The hand of God hath fallen heavily upon me, but His will be done."

"Amen!" answered the King reverently.

To detail the proceedings of this Council would be to write a chapter of English history. To raise taxes without

the aid of Parliament was the all-important subject under discussion. Tonnage and poundage, and other illegal levies, were strenuously resisted by the people, although they had ungrudgingly submitted to such exactions under the predecessors of the Stuarts. Wentworth was the last to speak.

While a timid spirit of temporising—a desire to do, yet a fear of consequences—of the storm that might be evoked—marked all preceding utterances, his counsel was bold, decisive, never swerving from the point proposed.

“Until the spirit of rebellion is subdued,” he said, “and men willingly submit to the power which God has placed over them, a Parliament can be but an incarnation of faction, grasping at such authority as shall paralyse the royal prerogative and render the King a mere puppet—and that must never be—seeking selfish interests, and devoid of that patriotism which sets the *amor patriæ* above all other considerations. To bring about such a consummation we must govern with relentless rigour, but immaculate justice; the burden of taxation should be as light as the exigences of the State can afford, and should be levied with as little oppressiveness as the peculiar circumstances will allow, so that we may show the people of England the King can rule wisely and justly without the promptings of their factious representatives.”

Such counsel was highly approved of by the King, although others demurred at it.

When, after much discussion, it had been decided to enforce the present imposts with all rigour, other, and scarcely less momentous, topics were taken under consideration, such as the King's proposed visit to Scotland to be crowned there. Which, being also resolved, Laud rose, and in a long and passionate speech, urged the great necessity of establishing, and if needs be forcing, the Episcopal form of religion upon that country. This proposition was strongly opposed by the more prudent councillors, even Wentworth regarded it with grave doubts, and the King himself seemed to shrink from it with some fear of consequences. But the violence and fanaticism of the Bishop bore down all objections, and by turns he pleaded, argued, bullied, and even threatened. Ultimately this discussion was deferred, a termination which exactly suited

his views, since it would give him the opportunity of working upon the King in private.

The business of the nation despatched, the Earl of Portland brought forward a promise, which the King had made him some time previously, of the gift of Chute Forest. The Lord Treasurer was a man at once imperious and timid, always in dread of the spectres raised by his own arrogance, envious of all who enjoyed the royal favour and ever seeking wealth and personal aggrandisement. More than once he had rendered himself obnoxious to the Queen, and upon hearing his request she came forward from the window, at which she had remained throughout the Council, offering no further interposition than an occasional ejaculation of assent or disapproval at the words of the different speakers.

"Methinks, my lord," she said, "you have not chosen a very *à propos* time for this solicitation. When once I begged of his Majesty some small favour for a faithful servant you could remind me of an empty treasury; it has not been filled since."

"Your Majesty," retorted Portland, insolently, turning to the King, "I thought the Council Chamber was for men, and that there was only one Sovereign in England."

"My lord, you forget yourself," answered Charles, with dignity.

But my Lord Treasurer's insolence was not so easily defeated. Finding insinuation fail he resorted to direct attack.

"Your Majesty's bounties are so large to your new favourites," he replied, "that you have none left for your old servants. My office is a thankless one, bringing neither honour nor profit, but much care and hatred; and since, as I hear, my Lord President of the North is anxious to possess it, it may please your Majesty to relieve me of its burdens."

"Now shame and confusion cover me," burst forth Wentworth, "if so mean a thought could enter my heart, as that to compass whatever I took most delight in, I should go about beguiling to supplant any man! I am no soft-tempered spirit, but I cannot endure to be mistaken, or suffer my purer and more entire affections to his Majesty to be soiled, or in the least degree prejudiced, with the loathsome and odious attributes of covetousness and ambitious falsehood."

"Portland, for shame!" said the King, sternly; "those who know my Lord Wentworth, know him to be incapable of such baseness; he has never sought to undermine the credit or favour of any man for his own aggrandisement."

"Then I have been misinformed, and regret I spoke so hastily," said Portland, apologetically; "there are ever slanderous tongues ready to sow strife between good friends—for such hitherto have been my Lord President and myself—and I hope my rash assertion may make no break in our amity."

Wentworth received the apologies coldly and disdainfully, for he knew the man, knew they were the offspring of fear, and that he envied and hated him none the less.

"I regard no man's tongue, whether it speak good or evil of me," he answered, glancing haughtily around. "I seek to please no man by my actions; if they be acceptable to my Sovereign I am content, and despise all meaner approbation."

This defiant speech was followed for a moment by an awkward silence, which the King broke by returning to a previous topic, and shortly afterwards dismissed the Council.

"Visit me in my closet at Whitehall two hours hence," he said to Wentworth, in a low voice.

Portland lingered behind the rest, and as they left the chamber turned with a humble air towards the Queen.

"I trust your Majesty will pardon my rudeness just now," he said, "but my cares for his Majesty's interest——"

"I thought the subject in question was your *own* interest, my lord," interrupted Henrietta Maria, sarcastically. "But say no more, we have become so used to your insolence that we have ceased to regard it."

My Lord Treasurer could only bow and retire with a mind full of apprehension.

"What a mockery is our sovereignty," said the Queen bitterly; "we have to endure insults and degradations that a *bourgeois* in your Eastcheap would not allow, for he would discharge the servant that dared to utter the words that man used to me."

"They have all but one thought," responded the King, "their own selfish interests, without one for mine. Wentworth is the only true friend and councillor I have."

"But he has too much the air of a king for a subject,"

quickly interposed the Queen ; “ I do not like that cold dark face, and those fierce eyes almost make me tremble ; he has no *rapprochement* ; he is a man of marble ; I do not like him.”

“ You are mistaken, he is the most sensitive and passionate of men,” replied Charles. “ To prove how well he serves us, remember what he has done in the North ; never has that part of our dominions been so wisely and capably governed ; I would the remainder of our realm were under such control.”

“ The man has genius,” retorted the Queen, “ but he has also ambition without bound ; he may do for England what Richelieu has done for France ; my poor brother is but a cipher upon the throne ; take warning.”

“ Wentworth is no more a Richelieu than I am a Louis XIII.,” answered Charles, a little angrily, for he prided himself upon his firmness and resolution, and could not endure to be compared with the weak and vacillating King of France. “ No subject shall ever trench upon my authority ; but in these troublous times such men as Wentworth must work uncurbed ; when their task is complete we will restrain their power, then they shall resume their position, we ours.”

The Queen sighed, but made no reply.

Two hours afterwards the King, who after the reception had returned to Whitehall through the private grounds, was closeted with my Lord President of the North.

“ You are too far distant for Councils, my lord,” he said ; “ I have frequently desired your good advice. Now that you have set in order affairs in the North you must give us more of your company at Court ; indeed, I trust shortly to find for you a yet more honourable post—but of that hereafter.”

Wentworth bowed, and after making an appropriate reply said, “ If it would please your Majesty to appoint me some deputy, a man of trust who could act for me with judgment and discretion during a temporary absence, I might visit London more frequently.”

“ True, true ; you might indeed. Do you know of such an one ?”

“ I do, sir ; one whom I have known from boyhood, and upon whose fitness I can pledge my honour. I speak of my secretary, Sir George Radcliffe.”

"Such a pledge is more than sufficient guarantee. It shall be as you desire. I would we had thought of that before, for your home can have but little pleasure for you now."

"But little, sire," answered Wentworth, gloomily, "save in the remembrance of past happiness."

"Melancholy indeed is that pleasure, my poor friend," responded the King, kindly. "Then you would not object to such employment as removed you to another part of the country?"

"I could object to nothing that would forward your Majesty's service; less now than ever, since my home ties are broken."

When the Minister had departed, Charles unlocked a small cabinet that stood near at hand and took forth a despatch which he had read more than once, but which he now again pondered over with bent brows and thoughtful visage.

It was from one of his Ministers in Ireland, setting forth, in the darkest colours, the lamentable condition of that kingdom.

"Yes, Wentworth is the man to reform these abuses," mused the King; "the only man capable of such a Herculean labour. He can still retain his Presidentship—but his deputy must be of my selecting, not his."

CHAPTER III.

THE MASQUE OF PEACE.

THE next day was that appointed for the grand masque of the Inns of Court, to celebrate the conclusion of peace. It had been some time in preparation. Its arrangements were decided by a committee of which Selden, Sir Jones Finch, Sir Edward Herbert, and Attorney Noy, were members; it was written by Shirley, the last of the great line of dramatists; the spectacular portion was arranged by Inigo Jones, and in magnificence it was to far surpass all that had yet been seen in the Stuart or Tudor Court. How poetically beautiful and tastefully splendid were these gorgeous pageants is known to all students of our early literature, and it is doubtful whether we of 1876, with all our boasted achievements in scenic art have, even in a theatrical point of view—we certainly have not in any other—surpassed those entertainments given at Whitehall considerably more than two centuries ago.

Wentworth's high position almost necessitated his presence at such festivities; at least, his rigid notions of etiquette would not have permitted him to claim an exemption on the score of private feelings; and at the appointed time, distasteful, and even painful, as all gaiety was to the sadness of his mind, he was in his place, dressed as became his rank and importance. But, even spite of this disposition, the scene which met his eyes upon entering the Banqueting Hall filled him with admiration and astonishment.

There had never been in England, there had never been in Europe, up to this period, a Court so polished, so magnificent as that of Charles the First. Bassompierre described the banquets and entertainments he witnessed there as surpassing anything of the kind that he had ever seen in France, and they were certainly equal to anything Louis XIV achieved afterwards at Versailles. The architecture of the interior of the great Hall corresponds with that of the exterior, and consists of a range of Ionic pillars with a window between each, surmounted by an entablature, upon which is raised a second row of pillars of the Corinthian order, with windows as below, and a gallery at the base. Vandyke was to have painted upon the walls the history of the Order of the Garter; but political troubles prevented the accomplishment of what would have been a noble work. Rubens, however, had painted upon the ceiling the apotheosis of James the First, the figures of which still look down upon the visitors to-day as it did upon this splendid assembly two hundred and forty-nine years ago.

At one end of the Hall was erected the stage, at present veiled by purple velvet curtains, deeply edged with bullion and embroidered in the same material with the arms of England and France. Thence up the centre were ranged banks of seats covered with crimson cloth, and beneath a canopy were two throne-chairs for the King and Queen. The banks of seats were for the great nobility; persons of meaner estate were provided with accommodation in the gallery above. The orchestra was concealed behind the scenes; its full complement being eight hautboys and sackbuts, six flutes, six recorders, eleven violins, six lutes, four viols, one harp, an organ, and fifteen musicians for lutes and voices. The apartment was illumined by countless waxen lights, which threw their radiance upon the splendid audience that were rapidly filling every seat. There were gentlemen in costumes of every hue and texture, of crimson and blue velvets, of gold and silver tissue almost hidden beneath bullion laces and precious stones; the cost of such suits may be surmised by the fact that Buckingham paid eighty thousand pounds for one court-dress. The attire of the ladies was equally splendid; their hair was entwined with jewels and ropes of pearls, their forms were clad in robes of costliest silks, satins, and laces. All the rank, all the

intellect, and all the beauty of England's nobility were there.

Presently there was a stir without, and the appearance of a number of pages from the grand entrance, which had not yet been used, announced the approach of royalty. The King and Queen came thus early to witness from the windows the arrival of the grand procession of the masquers, which was to start from Ely House, pass down Holborn, Chancery Lane, the Strand, and so on to Whitehall. Simultaneous with their entrance was heard the sound of distant music, the trampling of horses, and the confused hum of the coming crowd. Charles and his consort took up their stations at the central window, then there was a rush towards the others, everyone being eager to get a sight of the show.

The music, the trampling and the hum grew louder and louder, and at last the procession came in sight. First came four chariots, formed after the fashion of the Roman triumphal car, of an oval shape ; there had been a question of precedence among the masquers which had greatly embarrassed the committee, and this form was adopted so that no person should be before or behind the other, but all equally face forward ; each of these chariots contained four masquers and was drawn by six magnificent horses ; preceding these were twenty footmen in scarlet and silver with batons in one hand and torches in the other ; these were the Marshal's men whose duty it was to clear the road for the procession. Immediately behind them, on horseback, came the Marshal himself who was attended on each side by splendidly-dressed footmen, all bearing torches ; then came a hundred gentlemen of the Inns of Court mounted on horses, which, together with their housings, had been lent by the King and the nobility ; these gentlemen were attired in dresses of the most costly materials covered with gold and silver, each was attended by a page and two lacqueys ; twelve trumpeters in gorgeous liveries followed. Then followed the Anti-masque,* which was made up of cripples, beggars, and tatterdemalions mounted upon the most wretched horses that could be found ; and these marched

* "This," says Disraeli (*"Curiosities of Literature"*), "was a humorous parody of the more solemn masque, and sometimes relieved it."

to the music of keys and tongs; after them came men on horseback playing upon pipes and whistles, in imitation of the songs of birds, and these were succeeded by the Anti-masque of Birds, which consisted of a number of mounted boys dressed like various species of birds; there was also a man made up like an owl and carried in an ivy-bush; these also were attended by footmen bearing torches. Musicians playing bagpipes and hornpipes ushered in the Anti-masque of Projectors; this was a sly satire upon certain Scotch inventors who were soliciting the Court to grant them monopolies of their inventions. One man rode upon a very large horse which he guided by a very small bit, and wore upon his own head a headstall and reins, which signified a person who desired a patent for a new bit which was to make unlawful the use of all others; another wore a bunch of carrots upon his head to burlesque another projector who desired to take out a patent for fattening capons only on carrots. Now came the Grand Masque. First marched the King's chief musicians, attired as heathen priests. These were followed by a large chariot drawn by six horses in which were twelve persons attired as gods and goddesses; then six musicians; a second chariot like the former and six more musicians, each chariot attended by the usual torch-bearers, and then the first chariot of the grand masquers. This, like the others, was of the Roman form, and was most exquisitely painted, the prevailing colour being crimson embellished with silver; it was drawn by four horses abreast covered to the heels in cloth of tissue of crimson and silver, and upon their heads and buttocks were plumes of red and white feathers; the coachman was attired in the same colours, and of the same was even his whip and the cushion on which he sat. In the chariot sat four gentlemen of Gray's Inn in cloth of tissue encrusted with silver spangles, and these were attended by four footmen in crimson and silver liveries. After these followed six musicians, and then the gentlemen of the Middle Temple in a chariot of blue and silver, with trappings, liveries and dresses to match; to these succeeded the members of the Inner Temple; and fourth, and last, those of Lincoln's Inn, which terminated the procession.

The effect of this spectacle as viewed from the windows of Whitehall was indescribably picturesque and magnificent.

Hundreds of torches flashing upon glittering gold silver and gems, upon brilliant colours and gorgeous liveries, upon a multitude of faces, rendered the still clear summer night as bright as noonday ; the braying of trumpets mingled with the uncouth music of the Anti-masque, and the delightful strains of the King's musicians, the trampling of the horses, the buzz of the spectators, and the ringing cheer of the masquers as they approached the Palace, formed a scene of bewildering excitement.

So impressed were the royal spectators that the King commanded the procession to pass round by the tilt-yard, a view of which was obtained from the opposite windows, and parade twice round it.

At length, when all had taken their places, the Masque commenced.

The curtains opened upon an elaborate set-scene—an open place upon which were built out palaces, porticoes, houses, and in the extreme background, in the midst of a gardenlike landscape, the Forum of Peace. After the appearance of several allegorical characters who spoke and sang, this changed to the interior of a tavern divided into drinking-rooms and upon the windows of which was reflected the red glare of the setting sun. And here came on the rabble rout of the Anti-masque, the gambols of which very much resembled the comic scene of a Christmas pantomime. This was closed in by a woody landscape in which the Anti-masque of birds went through some grotesque movements and dances. When this was over the stage was darkened. Then in the highest part of the heavens there broke a whitish cloud, out of which came forth a golden chariot of exquisite workmanship in which sat Peace. When it had descended, the goddess stepped out and sang two songs. After this there appeared on the opposite side of the heavens a crimson cloud which disclosed a silver chariot bearing Ennonia, or Law, clad in a purple satin robe studded with golden stars, and a mantle of carnation laced with gold. When she had sung the middle heavens showed a cloud of pale blue, and a third chariot in which reposed the figure of Justice. After these personages had sung a trio the scene again changed, showing sixteen masquers dressed in carnation and silver pyramidically arranged upon terraces rising one above the other ; over their heads was an arbour of green trees, between

the branches of which could be seen glimpses of blue sky. This was followed by more singing and another comic interlude by the Anti-masque. After this a darkness fell upon the scene which represented a sombre sky out of which shone the new moon, while a faint light in the east harbingered the breaking day. Presently there arose a thick vapour, out of which there gradually developed the form of a young girl clad in dark blue showered with silver spangles; in her hand she held a dimly-burning torch; this figure represented the Dawn. After delivering a long poetical speech the cloud bore her out of sight. And this was the end.

Then the company to the strains of a grand march left the Hall and proceeded to an apartment where a magnificent banquet awaited them. Here again the display was superb both in beauty and magnificence. Tables groaning beneath massive and yet exquisitely-fashioned plate; dishes, the rarity of which would not have shamed the board of an Apicius or Lucullus and which would have been scarcely more grateful to modern palates; from these arose an odour pleasant to the nostrils of the epicures of that day, the odour of musk and ambergris, which, together with magesterial of pearl, were freely mixed both with food and wine. Servants in every variety of picturesque costume waited upon the guests. There were two long tables down each side of the apartment for the general company; on a daïs at the further end sat the King and Queen before a table of solid silver, with every appointment equally splendid. Strains of delicious and voluptuous music accompanied the change of each course, and although we might consider in these days of gas and electricity the illumination somewhat dim, yet the numerous waxen lights twinkling like stars in their golden and silver girandoles and candelabra produced a very beautiful effect.

As Wentworth cast his eyes around this splendid scene he could not but perceive how greatly the Court had advanced both in taste and luxury during the comparatively short interval that had elapsed since he had last mingled in its gaities. Many new modes and splendours had been introduced by Charles and Buckingham from Spain, after their visit to that country; and Spain, which had only just passed the meridian of its grandeur, then gave the tone and the fashion to all Europe. He also could not help observing a

yet more pleasing change in the superior purity and refinement of manners. There was a coarseness in the habits of the females of the Court of James which had almost entirely disappeared under the more decorous rule of his successor. The polished manners of Charles himself and the strict purity of his morals, although they could not eradicate vice, had done much by force of example and made at least outward decency a necessity to all who would enjoy the royal countenance.

Yet after their Majesties had retired, the festivity became warm and free, and there were many beautiful faces that owed their flush to a too free indulgence in the wincup, and jests were bandied from lip to lip and listened to gleefully that would very much disconcert our modern notions of propriety.

Wentworth, however, withdrew very soon after the exit of royalty. But not before he had been caught in the siren toils of Lady Carlisle and made to promise that he would pay her a visit on the following day.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SONG OF THE SIREN.

SHE was alone when he arrived, and never had she looked more beautiful; her toilette was the very perfection of that studied negligence which employs and yet conceals art. The apartment in which she received him was most elegantly appointed; luxurious in couches, carpets, laces, pictures, mirrors, cabinets, silk, and velvet; yet the most refined taste and the strictest attention to harmony of form and colour characterised all.

Such refinements were almost unknown both in England and France in those days, and were common nowhere in Europe except in the voluptuous Courts of Italy. Italian looms alone could produce those gorgeous satins and velvets, and the skill of Italian artificers alone could fashion those polished mirrors, that exquisite *orfèverie*, and those elegant forms of furniture. How striking and novel such innovations were to those accustomed to the gaunt, bare apartments, with their ponderous, ungraceful, and comfortless oaken furniture and uncarpeted floors, of even noble mansions both in town and country, can scarcely be appreciated by us, among whom such elegances are the rule instead of the exception. All men of taste have something of the Sybarite in their nature, and Wentworth was far from insensible to the secret charm of the place or of its presiding deity.

"You are indeed good to give me so early a visit," was her first greeting as she held out her beautiful white hand and met his with the gentlest pressure.

She seated herself upon a couch and invited him to take a place beside her. The conversation turned upon the insult offered to the Queen.

"The fellow should have been arrested set in the pillory and have had his ears cropped," she said. "If the King would be absolute he must show these malcontents he has the resolution and power to be so. Why do you exile yourself among those northern savages when there is so much greater need of your presence in London? If the heart be diseased the whole body is in danger."

"I shall henceforth probably be more at Court than heretofore," he answered.

"I rejoice to hear it," she replied, earnestly. "The bustle and change of scene will distract your mind from that affliction whose heavy hand is only too visible in your pale cheek and hollow eyes. But it could not be less for so incomparable a woman."

"Incomparable indeed!" he cried, warmly.

Most eloquently and artfully did the siren descant upon the virtues of a lady of whom she knew little, and whom she had hated in life as the rival who had won from her the man she loved; but she knew it was the surest road to the widower's heart, and she lingered over the picture of his past happiness until tears filled his proud eyes.

"Methinks I could be content to be in my grave if I could know such tears as yours were falling upon it," she said, in a tone of the deepest melancholy. "I have never known what it is to be loved absolutely, tenderly; through all my life I have yearned for that love, God only knows how passionately; but such has never been my lot—never will be now."

She was not acting in these words, they were a genuine outburst from her heart, and Wentworth felt their genuineness in all its force in his present all-sympathising mood. A tear trembled on the ends of her long eyelashes and her face was full of emotion; as he gazed upon it its beauty thrilled him with a pitying tenderness, and his memory leapt back to those days when he had loved this woman, then a wayward girl. But plain Sir Thomas Wentworth was no match for Lucy Percy, as her relations had haughtily informed him.

"And yet it might have been," he said, after a pause, involuntarily uttering the thoughts uppermost in his mind.

"I know it," she cried, eagerly, "and that is the secret grief which has ever since been gnawing my heart. My father and brothers crushed it; and I, poor silly fool, yielded only too readily to their persuasions not knowing what a precious thing I was casting aside."

His memory was busy with that old time, and every incident connected with that old love which he had believed was long since crumbled into dust was now passing vividly before his mind's eye. Instinctively his fingers closed upon her hand which lay so temptingly near his; the tear-stained face, pale with emotion, and full of appealing sadness was almost pressed against his shoulder. By an irresistible impulse he stooped his head and kissed her. But the touch of those lips, that sent a fire through his blood, recalled him to himself on the instant. He rose from his seat, walked to the window, drew aside the half-drawn curtains and looked out.

For a second Lady Carlisle remained as he had left her, with glowing cheeks and all a-tremble with pleasure. Then she also rose, knowing the spell was broken for that day and that any attempt to re-weave it would be most impolitic.

With all a clever woman's tact she turned the subject back to politics as unembarrassedly as though nothing had occurred. But Wentworth whose mind had been too deeply moved by conflicting emotions could not so easily recover calmness, and fearful of trusting himself any longer within the siren's spell made a somewhat abrupt adieu and departed. He was annoyed with himself for having been betrayed into a momentary weakness; but her beauty and fascination, and above all her pretended sympathy, had cast a glamour over his senses to which he had yielded, to which he would probably yield again did he come within its influence.

When he had gone she fell back upon the couch and gave herself up to a delicious reverie in which the whole scene was acted over again. Then she rose and gazed at herself in one of the Venetian mirrors. It was a scrutinising critical glance, that gradually relaxed into an expression of complacent satisfaction.

"Yes, I look very beautiful to-day," she murmured; "and I shall win him back. That kiss has bound him to me evermore. Such a man is worth the winning. And am not I worthy of him?"—and she cast another proud glance

at her lovely face and superb figure. "There are scores of the noblest and handsomest men of the land that I could bring to my feet by one look of invitation ; but he will soon be the greatest of all, the foremost man in England. I love him—yes, I do love him, and I must win him !"

She again raised her eyes to the mirror ; but it was not upon her own reflection they fell this time, but upon features white with passion. With an exclamation of terror she turned, and saw Pym standing in the doorway.

"Do not let me disturb your contemplation and soliloquy," he said, mockingly ; "I protest you are looking wondrous handsome to-day. My Lord Wentworth must have been colder than ice had he not melted before those glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes !"

Lady Carlisle was for a moment too disconcerted to make a reply. But her courage soon rose to the situation, and turning upon him haughtily, she said—"So you have been playing the eavesdropper ?"

"By accident. I was seeking you, and as I came to the door I heard a man's voice ; I listened for a moment and fancied I heard—a *kiss* ! upon which I discreetly retired to watch the departure of this favoured lover. When I returned I heard you venting your satisfaction in soliloquy. It is a dangerous practice ; let me warn you against it for the future."

"And how have you dared approach my private chamber without being announced ?"

"Because I have dared many a time before, unchecked and unchided," he answered, insolently.

There was a pause, and the man and woman regarded each other as though measuring one another's strength for the coming combat.

"How, or in what have I given you the right, Mr. Pym, to call me to account for the guests, or even the lovers I choose to entertain ?" demanded the lady, opening the battle with defiant hauteur.

"The right that one lover usually claims to object to a second," he answered, bluntly.

"Indeed ! It is news to me that you are my lover."

"Bah ! let us have no sophistry. It is true you have never compromised yourself, but you have known the meaning of my devotion as well as I have myself."

"I receive such devotion from all who approach me ; all men give me homage and talk love to me, it is the fashion—and all are equally indifferent to me."

"So you may construe the fulsome flatteries of the feather-headed Court popinjays, but not the words of such men as I, who speak only from the heart or brain."

"You pay a compliment to my knowledge of human nature far higher than I deserve."

She was half-reclining upon a couch near the window, daintily fanning herself, and speaking in a tone of cold irony that was lashing him into fury.

"Beware," he cried, "how you mock me ! I am no silken fopling to be encouraged, cajoled, used as a tool and then thrown aside like a soiled glove. Beware how you provoke my hate."

"Do you threaten ?" she exclaimed, rising suddenly, and confronting him with eyes that flashed as fiercely as his own.

"Ay ; and I will *do* ! You love this renegade, this traitor, this man whom I hate with all my soul, whose destruction I have sworn. You love him because he is great and powerful—because you believe he will be a second Buckingham ; you would love a blackamoor or a bandit chief and glory in it if he was famous, for you are all vanity ! Much love you would have given to plain Sir Thomas Wentworth banned by the Court ! Be Lady Wentworth, revel in your high-blown pride till the wind-bag shall burst and you fall to ruin !"

Alternately pale and red, but never flinching before the savage intensity of the man, although her heart was sinking with vague terrors, she could yet sufficiently control herself to preserve the outward seeming of courage and dignity.

"You are an insolent coward to address such language to a lady of my birth," she said. "Poor presuming fool ! did you imagine because you have won some favour with the mob that you could raise your arrogant eyes to me, a daughter of the house of Percy ?"

She had struck home this time. Like all men who rave against the distinctions of birth only because they cannot claim them, Pym was most sensitive to such scorn as this, and his voice shook with passion as he answered :

"Before many years have passed away you self-styled

great ones of the world will curse your noble birth, for it shall be a bane, a brand of Cain to you marking you out for destruction. Your reign has been a long one, but it is drawing to a close and may *you* live to see it !”

“You have spoken words,” she answered, “that were I to call in a guard, would send you to the Tower.”

“Charles Stuart would not dare to touch a hair of my head,” replied Pym, arrogantly.

“Were I to reveal *all* I know of your plots and intrigues no other course would be open to him,” she retorted, meaningly.

He changed colour.

“Now mark me,” she went on, observing her advantage and pressing it ; “speak abroad one word of what has passed between us this day—one word against my reputation, or seek to thwart me in any way and I will give the King such clues as will scatter dismay and destruction among your confederates.”

The man was at bay ; the woman had won the battle after all.

“Silence for silence ; is it a bargain ?” she demanded, after a pause.

He folded his arms upon his broad chest and regarded her for several seconds with a long steady look out of which all passion had vanished, but the compressed lips and lowering brows told how treacherous was this sudden calm.

“I deserve this check,” he said, at last, “for being such an ass as to put confidence in a woman’s honour.”

“And now, sir, you can go,” she resumed, her face lit up with triumph and scorn. “If we encounter in public my demeanour will be unchanged ; I trust you will observe the same policy. In private we meet no more.”

“You use your victory like all fools and women—mercilessly—*rashly*. Make the most of it ; it will be brief,” he said, as with a parting glance of bitterness he quitted the room.

When he was gone her overstrained nerves gave way and her sex asserted itself. She knew that should Wentworth discover that she had coquetted with Pym so far as to foster a belief in him that he was a chosen suitor, there would be an end to all her hopes ; a man so proud, so exquisitely sensitive in all things touching his honour, would shrink,

however strong might be his love, from any woman upon earth whose name could be tarnished by the breath of scandal. Pym would be henceforth her deadliest enemy, for there is no hate so bitter as that born of love; and her knowledge of his secrets was too slight to hold him long in subjection. As it has been before intimated she made her house the resort not only of poets and artists, but also of political factions; her restless vain ambitious mind loved the excitement of such intrigues, which gave her an importance among men of all classes, and she could not endure that one scene of the great drama which was being acted around her, whether the characters therein were nobles or plebeians, should pass without her presence. She had lured Pym in his moments of infatuation to speak more freely of the doings and prospects of his party than was consonant with prudence, but scarcely sufficient to seriously compromise it; although by betraying his confidences to the King she might somewhat embarrass its future proceedings.

No time must be therefore lost in endeavouring to so far entangle Wentworth in her toils that he would find it impossible to extricate himself, even should an explosion come.

CHAPTER V.

THE SECRET MEETING.

THAT busy and thickly-populated neighbourhood of Westminster still known as Tothill Fields was in the time of Charles the First a dreary houseless flat, not safe for unarmed men to cross after nightfall on account of the many footpads that lurked about it. In the centre was a mall where the Westminster School boys used to disport themselves in the summer afternoons. It was also a favourite rendezvous for duels, and many a gallant life had there been given up for some trifling cause that came within the high-strained code of honour of the day. A few scattered houses of some antiquity fringed the north-western boundary of this waste; beyond these all was open country to the village of Chelsea.

It was to one of these houses, a large gloomy-looking mansion that had been built before Tudor or Stuart had sat upon the English throne and which was now falling into decay, that Pym directed his steps after dark upon the day of his quarrel with Lady Carlisle. The house was owned by his friend Bastwick, and was a secret meeting-place of the more advanced and fanatical of the Parliamentary and Puritan party. From these gatherings were sent forth spies and agents to foment the ever-increasing disaffection of the people; and here within almost bowshot of Whitehall were hatched those plots and schemes which culminated in the rebellion.

Not a light was visible from the fields and the building looked uninhabited as Pym passed through the open gates into the courtyard and up to a lofty porched doorway, stumbling all the way over the broken stones that lay hidden among the high tangled grass.

Three peculiar knocks with the handle of his sword obtained him admission. Within all was pitch dark.

"Who is it?" demanded a voice.

"Pym."

"Enter," was the reply.

Feeling his way down a long passage in which there was no glimmer of light, and guided by a murmur of voices, he proceeded cautiously until his hand came in contact with a door. Opening this he entered a large sombre-looking apartment, the furniture of which consisted only of one long table down the centre and a few forms and benches scattered here and there; a lamp suspended from the ceiling did little to dispel the obscurity of the vault-like place. There was a number of men all plainly dressed, and all more or less of the Puritan type, some seated, some standing in groups, all in earnest conversation.

But above all other voices rose that of a man whose costume and Geneva band indicated the Nonconformist minister. He was holding forth to several others upon the sinful doings of the Court—its patronage of players and artists, in which Charles and his queen were likened to the Egyptians and the Moabites, and threatened with all the curses that fell upon those nations.

"If we could but rid ourselves of these fanatics!" observed Pym in a low voice to a man who accosted him upon his entrance; "their love of preaching monopolises all our time, and a play or a picture is to them a more deadly grievance than tonnage or poundage."

"They are the very marrow of our party, and when the struggle comes they will be its masters," was the reply.

"I trust not," answered Pym, frowningly, "for that would be to exchange one tyranny for a worse. Heaven preserve us from fanaticism!"

New comers continued to arrive; some had evidently travelled a distance; these were bearers of despatches which they handed to Pym, who had now taken his seat at the

head of the long table, around which gathered all, except the preacher, who still continued to hold forth to two or three auditors ; but these fell off one by one to listen to the papers which Pym was reading aloud and making passing comments upon.

These were reports from different parts of the country of the progress of the popular party and of the feelings of the people. They told of riots, of resistance to the levying of taxes, of widespread disaffection that like a smouldering fire waited but a breath to fan it into a flame.

Some of the more eager spirits were for immediate action, but such counsels were vehemently opposed by Pym.

"That would be to throw back our hopes for years," he cried. "Day by day the king's necessities will force him to new exactions, new acts of tyranny, until the whole nation, no longer able to endure the burden, will rise spontaneously. We have not come to that pass yet. Were you to raise the banner of rebellion now thousands of the clamourers would fall away from us. Wait until the iron has been driven further into their hearts. I find the reports from the North are the least encouraging, that there the people are as subdued as beaten curs ; thanks to my Lord President, Charles Stuart's iron hand."

"A knife was found to reach Buckingham's heart," interposed Savile, "and this despot must be crushed by any means fair or foul before we can even breathe freely."

A murmur of applause greeted this speech.

"By any means, save assassination," observed Pym, emphatically. "The dagger is not an Englishman's weapon, and a halter is the only fit punishment for him who uses it. You, John Savile, were a courtier when the royal sun shone upon you ; a patriot now its beams are turned another way." Then changing his tone to one of blunt frankness, he added, "Tush, tush, man ! never look glum, I must have my jest ; there are few among us who have not turned our coats. You hate Wentworth ; so do I ; that is a sufficient bond of union between us."

At that moment there entered two new comers, who were no other than Hornby and Launcelot Franklin.

"Gentlemen," said the first, I bring you a recruit, and a worthy one, Mr. Launcelot Franklin."

Every eye was turned upon the young man with a scrutinising look.

"Does any here know him besides yourself?" demanded Pym.

The soldier glanced among the company until his eye fell upon Savile, who had made no movement to respond to the query.

"There is a gentleman," he said, pointing, "who cannot have forgotten him. But," he added, not waiting for a reply, "you must all have heard of Sir Richard Franklin, his father, one of the staunchest Puritans in the shire of York. Not," he muttered aside, "that I hold that to be much recommendation."

"Is not Sir Richard under the ministry of that precious servant of the Lord, Ezekiel Blatherwick?" demanded the preacher.

"Yes," answered Launcelot.

"Then is he one of the chosen. Art thou the young man concerning whom Ezekiel did write to me as one likely to enrol himself among those saints in the Lord to whom it is my precious privilege to expound his Holy will? I am Ishmael Wolf."

"The same," replied Launcelot, shortly.

"And wherefore hast thou not——"

Here Pym's deep voice broke in. "Enough, enough," he said, impatiently, "these are private matters which you can best discuss alone. And now, young gentleman, are you prepared to take an oath to help with your best power the cause of liberty and parliamentary government, and, if needs be, to lay down life and fortune for their attainment?"

"I am," answered Launcelot, firmly.

"Are you also willing to take an oath never to reveal, not even under torture, the names of any personages you may see here, or anything you may hear?"

"I am," was again the answer.

A solemn and most binding oath was then administered to him, Wolf holding the Bible and dictating the words. After this the suspended discussion was resumed and plans for future propagandism were discussed.

"But remember," said Pym, "no word against the King, the glitter of the crown and sceptre still dazzles men's eyes and surrounds the royal person with a glamour that the

timid mistake for a holy halo ; let all your cry be against evil counsellors who mislead that innocent lamb, Charles Stuart, into acts of tyranny."

"Once impress this upon the people's minds and they will hold to it like a religion, and fall back from us when we show our true design," said one.

"Bah !" replied Pym, contemptuously ; "when the rage for destruction once seizes upon a people it is like the fury of a drunken man, it knows no bounds, and when that time comes we shall be the masters to impose *our* will."

Soon afterwards the meeting broke up, the conspirators leaving the house at intervals, one by one, or in twos.

"Well, and what think you of the men we have just left ?" inquired Hornby when he and his companion were alone.

"I should like to have found them actuated less by selfish motives, by ambition, private hatred, greed, and sectarianism," replied Launcelot. "It seems to me that few if any there are inspired purely and simply by hatred of tyranny in the abstract and a love of humanity. All seem eager only to replace one despotism by another. What I long to find are men passionate only to lift off the fetters of oppression and superstition under which the lowly have groaned and perished through so many ages, and then, like Cincinnatus, go back into their humble sphere seeking no rewards beyond the blessings of mankind, unless called to command by the universal voice of their fellow-citizens."

"There are many enthusiasts like yourself, but yet they are too few to be ever anything but a hopeless minority. Whether monarchists or republicans the mass of mankind will seek only their own aggrandisement, calling it loyalty, patriotism, and such-like pretty names. Man is the same voluptuous, luxurious, avaricious, fighting animal whether he be monarchical or republican ; you may as well attempt to wash away the leopard's spots as to cleanse him from his favourite vices ; he will ever be a Sybarite in heart and a spiller of blood while his race endures ; he may be improved but can never be transformed."

"Yours is a hopeless philosophy," responded Launcelot, sadly. "If it be the true one all our aspirations are mere Will-o'-the-wisps leading us into quagmires, instead of bright stars guiding us to a promised land."

"It is the philosophy of all men who have looked upon the world with an understanding eye as many years as I have," replied Hornby. "Yet it is not so hopeless as you think it. You young enthusiasts who look upon the world not with an outer but an inner eye that magnifies and transforms every object, will be content with nothing short of perfection, and believe it attainable. But we whom rough usage has deprived of that glamour, know that all earthly good and evil are but comparative."

Launcelot said no more; such conversations were frequent between them, and usually ended thus. It was during one of these that Hornby had proposed to initiate him into a league of which he had been some time a member. Hence their presence at Bastwick's house.

But we will leave them now to follow the footsteps of two other persons of that assembly.

When Savile had risen to depart Pym touched him upon the arm, saying, "I will walk with you. You know this youngster who took the oath to-night?" he observed, as they walked across the fields.

"Yes," replied Savile, indifferently.

"A likely-looking youth enough; I like his looks—a frank, handsome face, a little dreamy perhaps, but full of high courage."

"Hum."

"So he is no favourite of yours?"

"I do not *love* him. We quarrelled once and fought."

"And you got the worst of it, I suppose?"

"Not I, but he did. I laid him upon a sick-bed for weeks."

"He must have committed some grave fault against you for such a punishment not to appease your anger."

"It was not that the fault was so great—truth to tell we quarrelled over a wench."

"Oh, oh! I should not have suspected my modest-looking gentleman of this."

"Hark ye, a word of caution; the girl is a ward of Wentworth's. This Franklin was once on great terms at Woodhouse, until his father, on account of this wench, forbade his visits and sent him abroad. Of course my Lord Lucifer was not to be outdone, and confirmed the prohibition. Since then there has been a distance between

them, or there is *supposed* to be, for anything known to the contrary ; still I would have you keep a keen eye upon this fellow as having *once* been the friend of Wentworth and as being likely to be so again."

"If I have any knowledge of faces I do not believe there is any treachery in his ; nevertheless your warning is worth remembering and shall not go unheeded. But who is this ward of Wentworth's ? It is the first time I have heard of such a person."

"That is more than I or any one else can explain ; she has been under his care from infancy."

"Her name ?"

"Ethel."

"What else ?"

"That is ~~the~~ only one she bears."

"What account does he give himself ?"

"He has never deigned to give any, beyond that she is his ward and the daughter of an old friend."

"Probably she is his own child."

"Some have thought so ; but she is eighteen, and he is only thirty-seven."

"There have been fathers as young."

"Truly ; but I scarcely think it is so."

"And how did the late Lady Wentworth behave towards her ?"

"As an elder sister ; and a most loving one too."

"Is she still at Woodhouse ?"

"Yes ; under the protection of my Lord President's sister."

"Well, you have told me news. And so this young Franklin is her lover ?"

"He would fain be so."

"She is pretty, then ?"

"She is beautiful."

For a few moments they walked on in silence.

"By-the-bye," said Savile presently, "you seem to know the man who was with him. Godfrey—Godfrey what is his name, Hornby ?"

"Yes ; I have known him many years, and under different circumstances."

"Then, perhaps, you know that he also is an occasional visitor at Woodhouse ?"

"Indeed ! How know you that ?"

"I myself have twice seen him there."

"Ah yes, I remember," muttered Pym to himself, "they were great friends once ; but I did not know they had renewed acquaintance since his return."

"'Tis strange, is it not, that both these men should be connected with Wentworth and yet league themselves with us ? Have a care, friend Pym, that we bring not treachery amongst us."

"I would stake my life upon the faith of Godfrey Hornby. But here our paths separate, good-night."

"I do not like that fellow," mused Pym when he was alone ; "he has an evil and malignant spirit ; but he has a hatred to Wentworth equal to my own, and that would reconcile me to the devil himself. He will be useful to me, and that hatred will keep him faithful to our cause, otherwise I should distrust him. But this girl, who can she be ? If this could be turned to any account ? But how ?"

And deep in thought he slowly wended his way homewards.

CHAPTER VI.

THE REVEALING OF A SECRET.

As Pym was walking down the Strand a few days afterwards he encountered Hornby.

"The very man I most wished to meet," he cried, holding out his hand.

"Indeed! We are well met then," replied the soldier; "and what is the weighty matter between us?"

"We cannot talk here in the open street; come with me to my chambers, where we shall not be interrupted."

Pym lived in Lincoln's Inn, occupying comfortable and excellently-furnished chambers upon the first-floor of the red brick building which adjoins the Chancery Lane gateway, and which, save that it was cleaner and newer, presented then a very similar appearance to what it does at the present day. When they were seated, he began the conversation by inquiries as to Hornby's motive for bringing Mr. Franklin into their society.

"Motive! None," answered Hornby, with a look of surprise; "save that he is a young enthusiast brimming over with the most exalted ideas of liberty, republicanism, and the perfectibility of man; and one who called upon in a just cause would be ready to act as well as to think; can you have better than such? These brave young bloods are far more worth than your canting Puritans and disaffected courtiers, who have no thought beyond cramming their fanaticism down other people's throats, and of plundering their enemies."

"You are right. Those are the men we want to balance the Puritans, who it must be confessed are the most vigorous of our party. You have but confirmed my own impression of this youngster. But it was told me last night that he was in some way connected with the Wentworth family."

"I believe he has some foolish fancy for a damsel who is under Lord Wentworth's guardianship," replied Hornby carelessly.

"I did not know that you kept up your old correspondence with Wentworth," said Pym.

"I understand now at what you are aiming," said Hornby facing round and meeting his gaze unflinchingly; "some time-server has been hinting to you doubts of my honour. Bring the rascal to my face and I'll prove it upon him with such a sharp and forcible argument"—grasping the hilt of his sword—"as shall cure him of doubting for the rest of his days."

"Nay, my old friend, do not be so irate; remember in these troublous times men cannot be over nice in their dealings with each other, or be so fearful of giving offence that they dare not utter a doubt when the certainty might send their heads to the block."

"I have visited Wentworth; may do so again, without choosing to render up an account of my doings to any man; and the same answer will serve for my young friend; if you distrust us on that account and choose to believe every cogging, cozening knave that would put upon honest men the treason which rankles in his own thoughts, why do so, and we will leave you to such, and wish you God speed."

"Did I not know you so well so much indignation for a trifle would be to me more suspicious than all I have heard," answered Pym, gravely.

"What have you heard?"

"No more than I have told you; that you have been a recent visitor at Wentworth-Woodhouse; that Mr. Franklin was once a favoured guest and that he is still in pursuit of a certain damsel who resides there. Remember it is not your old friend Pym who is speaking now or who doubts your truth, but a man to whose prudence the fortunes and lives of many men and the safety of a great cause are confided."

Hornby thoughtfully pulled his moustache and did not reply for some little time. "You wish for some explanation of these visits," he said at last.

It was now Pym's turn to hesitate. Had there been involved in the answer only a solution of that doubt of possible treachery which Savile had endeavoured to instil into his mind he would have freely answered No, as his suspicions, if he ever had any, were now quite dissipated, but his curiosity was aroused concerning this mysterious ward of whom he thought Hornby might be able to give some account.

"I have no wish to force you to any confession," he answered, with a shrug. Hornby rose from his seat, went over to the window and stood there for some minutes nervously playing a tattoo upon the glass with his nails.

"Well, well, let us say no more about it," said Pym at last.

"Not so," answered Hornby, returning to his seat. "You are the only man in England, except Wentworth, who knows me for what I am, and therefore there is no reason for any half-confidences between us. I should have told you what I am about to tell you long ago but that I hated to approach the subject. You know that I had by my wife, two children : a boy who died in his infancy—thank God !—and a girl who was also supposed to have died."

"*Supposed* to have died?" observed Pym, who was listening with the most earnest interest to his words.

"Ay, but for that I have not to thank God, would I had ! She was but a twelvemonth old when that woman left me, and was her living image. I used after *that* to set her upon my knee, and scrutinise her features almost by the hour together, trying to trace some resemblance, however faint to my own ; we were as unlike as man and child of the same nation could be ; but I fancied at times there was something of *his* look in her face. God knows, it might have been only imagination ; but the fancy grew upon me until I could no longer endure the sight of the child. Perhaps you may remember how sensitive I was in my young days upon honour and reputation."

"I remember you as the most hot-headed springald that

ever came under my notice ; that you would, as Shakspeare says, 'quarrel with a man for cracking nuts because thy eyes were hazel,'” observed Pym, shrugging his shoulders.

“You can understand, then, what I suffered under the foulest dishonour that can befall a man. Could I have traced them there would have been no word spoken ; I should have killed them on the instant and trampled them beneath my feet, until I had crushed out every semblance of humanity and rendered their bodies as loathsome as their souls.”

He uttered these words with a savage fury that told how little time had softened the memory of his wrongs and how relentlessly he would still revenge them.

“So bloody were my thoughts that at times I could scarcely restrain myself from passing my sword through the poor helpless child, who, terrified at my fierce looks, used to tremble and cry whenever I came near it. This to my heated fancy was proof beyond dispute that she was no flesh of mine ; and to save myself from the crime the devil was ever prompting me to commit I resolved to put it away from me. You know that I and Thomas Wentworth were fellow-students at college. In my trouble he was the truest and most pitiful of my friends, and thus I made him the confidant of all my agony, doubts, fears, and devil-promptings. He had then been married two or three years to Lord Clifford’s daughter, and had no children. He took a fancy to this child and offered to adopt it. I at once assented, and to rid myself for ever of this doubtful offspring signed a formal deed by which I relinquished all claim and all power for evermore over her, vesting in him every legal and natural right. But with one reserve. I made him take a solemn oath never without my permission to reveal to her or any other living soul save his wife, from whom he was to exact an equal binding pledge, the name of her parents or in what manner she came into his hands. This done, having spent a year in vainly searching for *them*, I went abroad, changed my name—and you know the rest.”

“Then this girl whom Franklin loves is your daughter,” said Pym slowly. “Does he know it ?”

“No, nor would I have him on any account.”

“Then you went to Woodhouse to see her ?”

“Ye—es,” replied Hornby—by which name as by that

he is known to all the other characters of the story we shall continue to distinguish him—"I confess to having felt a curiosity to know whether she still lived. While resting at an inn during the heat of the day I overheard high words passing between three young men touching a young demoiselle living under Wentworth's protection. Swords were drawn, a meeting arranged, and I offered myself for second to her defender, who was Launcelot Franklin. I had guessed who the damsel was. Strange, was it not?"

"Did you make any attempt to regain your rights over her?"

"That would have been useless even had I been so inclined, for had I not irrecoverably deprived myself of them?"

"You speak as though you wished you had not."

"In moments of weakness I sometimes think I might have been too hasty. But what's done is done, and there's no more to be said."

"Were she my child I would have her back, did I so desire it, in spite of all the bonds in the world. Does Wentworth much affect her?"

"He spoke of her with all the fondness of a father."

"A father!" remarked Pym with a slight sneer, "he has scarcely years enough for so tame an affection. She is very beautiful, I hear."

Hornby winced, and a shadow fell upon his face.

"And you have never heard of either of *them*?" resumed Pym, abruptly shifting the subject before the other could reply.

"Never."

"By-the-bye, what was his name? I forget it."

"Craston."

"Ay, I remember now," said Pym thoughtfully, "a devil-may-care fellow; I met him once or twice when neither of us was in very reputable company. Craston!—let me think!—that name has a more familiar sound to me than would come of those times. I am sure I have heard something about it, something notable too, not so very long ago."

"Think; think; rack thy memory," cried Hornby, starting to his feet; "give me but a clue to him"

"Time then has not softened your hate."

"No, nor would eternity."

"Then you would still kill him?"

"I would, had he fifty lives."

"And what of *her*?"

Hornby paused before he replied, "I would force from her the truth whether the girl is or is not my child. For the rest—I cannot tell. But can you not remember how you have heard that name?"

"I cannot for the life of me now, but I shall ere long. Where do you lodge?"

"I am to be heard of at the Cock, in Tothill Street."

"As soon as I can trace back that memory I will send to you."

"Remember," said Hornby, "all that has passed between us is in strict confidence; you will pledge me your word that nothing of it ever passes your lips."

"I do."

And shaking hands they parted.

Book V.—The Promise to the Dead.

CHAPTER I.

MEMORIES.

WENTWORTH-WOODHOUSE looked little changed, although its dear mistress slept in her tomb; not so cheerful, for the servants wore black instead of their handsome liveries, and it lacked that sweet noble face which had ever cast a sunshine over all. In her place had come a quiet, grave lady, who had much of her brother's haughty reserve, but who never unbent to familiarity as he did, and whom none of the household liked.

It was Ethel who, in so far as her age and position were able, had taken Lady Wentworth's place in all affections. "She is so like our dear mistress in all her ways," the domestics would say. How Ethel had grieved for her great loss need not be dwelt upon; it seemed to leave her alone in the world—to be a link snapt out of her existence. There was not a spot in the old house that was not hallowed to her by remembrances; there was not a patch of green-sward in the old park that did not call up memories of their sweet intercourse; wherever her eyes turned or her foot fell the spirit of the dead was about her. Most anxiously had she looked forward to the coming of Mistress Elizabeth Wentworth, hoping that she might find in her some consolation in her bereavement. But at the first glance of that dark handsome face the sympathies that were ready to gush forth shrank

back chilled and rebuked, and the unerring instinct of a highly-sensitive nature taught her there was little in common between them. The alliance with the Hollises had not been favoured by the Wentworths, who were opposed to them in politics and religion; and Thomas, who was ever haughty and impatient of the least interference with his will, had held but little intercourse with his family since his marriage. Mistress Elizabeth had seen her brother's wife but a few times and never had been in intimate relation with her, consequently she could not at all enter into the sorrow that was around her with more than the outward show of decency, and she was too proud and too honest to make any pretence of what she did not feel. Here alone was sufficient cause to bar sympathetic communication between her and Ethel, whose every feeling was at present absorbed by her grief; and beyond this she felt that there was a restraint in the lady's manner towards her—an indefinable something that separated them by an icy barrier.

During the time immediately following his wife's death Wentworth had retired into the most rigid seclusion, seldom quitting his chamber except for the duties of his office. With these, however, he did not suffer his private sorrows to interfere; he was ever at his post with a rigid punctiliousness that exceeded if possible that of past times, and the pale worn face and hollow eyes were the only outward signs of the sufferings within. Thus the affairs of the household were as foreign to him as though he had been a hundred miles away. Once a day he met the inmates of his house at the dinner-table, but the meal was usually eaten in silence; after which they saw no more of him, not even at prayers, which were conducted by Mr. Greenwood. And thus it continued until his departure for London.

His absence was extended only to a fortnight, as he could not longer be spared from the urgent affairs of the North; but the King was very loath to accede to his return. It was on a fine mild day towards the end of June that he once more passed through the park gates and rode slowly down the avenue leading to the house. In the distance he saw three figures moving quickly towards him, and descried them to be those of Ethel and his two eldest children. He reined in his horse and waited for them to come up. The children got to him first, panting with their run, and were lifted into

the saddle by one of his servants. He pressed them tenderly in his arms and kissed their upturned faces, and they clung round his neck one on each side, calling him "Dear, dear father!"

The dark stern face quivered and all his power of will could not keep back the tears that dimmed his eyes and trickled down his cheeks. There was not one of his attendants, coarse rough men as they were, that did not turn aside his head as much to hide his own emotion as not to pry upon his master's weakness.

No word had been spoken except by the children; Ethel stood a little distance off watching the scene through a mist of tears. Never before had he returned on a fair day, not even from a few hours' ride, without his dear lady going forth to meet him, and for an instant his glance seemed to seek for her.

"Ethel, dear child," he said, stooping forward and extending his hand to her.

She could just reach it and press it to her lips, but could not speak.

"Ah!" he sighed, "we are one fewer than we used to be."

Slowly and with downcast heads, Ethel walking beside his horse, the cavalcade moved on, the gleeful prattle of the children making a striking contrast to the silent sadness of their elders. On the steps of the grand entrance waiting to receive her brother stood Mistress Elizabeth; beside her was Mr. Greenwood, and behind them was ranged the whole household. The children had stoutly refused to let go their hold, and so he dismounted with them clinging still about his neck and waking the silent echoes of the old courtyard with their shrill laughter. He gave his hand to Ethel and led her up the steps.

"Brother, you are welcome home," said Mistress Elizabeth; her voice was cold, and there was ill-concealed displeasure in the glance she cast upon Ethel.

As Wentworth stooped forward to kiss her forehead he caught the direction of her glance. He pressed the hand he held more firmly, and after cordially saluting the chaplain extended the other to his sister. What a difference in the feel of those cold, rigid fingers that lay so passively in his to those others so warm, so full of electric sympathy!

As he passed between the files of domestics he had a kindly greeting for all, and every face beamed affection upon him, for this stern master was beloved by all who served him. And so he ascended the broad stairs, with his sister on one side and Ethel on the other, and the two children still perched upon his shoulders and clinging to his neck.

"Now, pretty ones," he said, as they entered the great dining-room, "you have had ride enough for one day."

A servant lifted them down.

"Come with me, darlings," said Mistress Elizabeth, holding out her hands.

"No, no ; we will stay with Ethel and father," cried the eldest.

And both ran away from her and clung to Ethel's gown. Mistress Elizabeth said no more ; but she did not look pleased.

So Ethel went away into the recess of one of the windows and sat down until the dinner should be served, for it was nearly noon ; and one of the children climbed upon her lap, putting its arms round her neck and pressing its little face close against hers, while the other leaned against her knees and prattled to her. Had it not been for her youthful face she might well have been taken for the mother, with such gentle affection did she treat them.

Wentworth stood leaning against the great fireplace watching this beautiful picture with moistened eyes and deep in memory, unconscious of all else around.

"Brother, dinner is served, and Mr. Greenwood is waiting to say grace," said his sister, sharply.

Wentworth started from his reverie and took his seat.

After his return, the first bitterness of his grief being past, he fell more into his old ways ; he was more reserved and austere, but there was a chastened sadness in his air that softened all harshness.

Days and weeks went by and still the promised commission for Sir George Radcliffe, whom he had informed of his promotion and anticipatively placed in office, did not arrive. He thought the King had forgotten his promise and in one of his despatches took the liberty to remind him of it.

About a fortnight afterwards there came a letter from his Majesty in which, after much circumlocution, he set

forth that he was unable to keep his promise being under a prior obligation for the advancement of a certain gentleman, whom he named, to whom he was much bounden, but that Sir George should not be forgotten. This letter greatly troubled Wentworth for more causes than one. In the first place, he was deeply mortified at the false position in which he found himself placed in regard to Radcliffe, and felt deeply that the King should put aside his recommendation in favour of a mere courtier with no capacities for the office, and with no sound claim upon his Majesty's bounty; and beyond such personal motives there fell a heaviness upon his heart, for this act seemed like a confirmation of those slanders which were everywhere spoken by the King's enemies—that the King was insincere and faithless and that no reliance could be put upon his word. If such were the case, what hope was there of crushing out disaffection, since falsehood is ever creating new foes and is held, and justly, by all mankind as the most unpardonable of crimes in a ruler?

Soon afterwards Sir Walter Ashton arrived; he was a silken fop, full of over-strained courtesies and all the fripperies and affectations of the time. Wentworth cared not to entertain him long at Woodhouse; his attendants brought among the simple Yorkshire domestics all the follies and vices of town footmen, and by their ribaldry and free manners created quite a disturbance in the household. Worse still, Sir Walter forced his gallantries upon Ethel, very much distressing her thereby and arousing Wentworth's anger. He suppressed his annoyance, however, which his punctilious honour, save in the event of a direct affront, would not permit him to display to a guest sent by the King. Nevertheless, he took an early opportunity of sending him and his fellows away to York, where, under the direction of a trusty secretary, this gallant played at being deputy-president and disported himself according to his pleasure.

Thus the heavy cares of his office were not at all lightened to Wentworth whose health continued to suffer by his application. His only recreations were a ride across country and a stroll through the woods in the evenings with his sister, Ethel, and the children, in which there was that strange tender pleasure that grief softened by time takes in

revisiting spots hallowed by a dead love. It was but in the course of things that Ethel, who had been *their* constant companion in the old happy time; Ethel, who could echo his every memory and call up others that had faded, should always be at his side; that to her nearly all his conversation should be addressed; that there should be such a wondrous sympathy to each other in their tearful faces; that they should be forgetful of every other presence save that of the children, the only link that now bound them with the dead.

Wentworth was sometimes obliged to absent himself from home for several days together. Then how impatiently did he look forward to the renewal of those sweet communings, those wanderings in the cool eventide beneath the green shadows which were now the sole joy of his life! Mistress Elizabeth was of course always with them, yet was wholly apart from them; she knew nothing of the subjects they conversed upon, cared not to know anything. No "Do you remember?" or "Have you forgotten?" could come from her lips, and those phrases alone had a charm for either's ears.

It was the same in the house; Ethel had insensibly, without the shadow of design, glided into her dear lady's place; the servants instinctively looked to her, for did she not know all the ways of the household?—did she not know what best pleased my lord? The children turned from all to cling to her, for who was so tender and gentle to them as Ethel? who could talk to them so sweetly of their dead mother who was already fast becoming a pretty pleasant myth in their fading memories?

Ever in Wentworth's mind was his wife's dying words: "*If I could be assured that the other who is to take my place would love and cherish you as I have done, if I could be assured that she would love and cherish my children in her inmost heart as though she were indeed their mother.*" She had found such an one; had he not also found her? Had he not also found that Ethel would be all this and more? At times he would compare that beautiful face, pure as some saint of Raffaele's, with the voluptuous beauty of Lady Carlisle; those eyes that beamed upon him so modestly, yet tenderly, with those other haughty orbs that softened only to allure. Would *she* love and cherish his children in her

inmost heart? No; her love was the offspring of passion and ambition and could embrace no such delicate tenderness as that.

The thought of the world's opinion would often obtrude itself; but again the words of his wife came like some heavenly prompting: "*The wife of my Lord Wentworth so that she can do honour to him by her beauty and her virtues needs no quarterings, for his greatness and nobility are enough for both. The descendant of John of Gaunt, with a lineage as high as that of the Stuarts, and the favourite Minister of the King, can condescend to stoop to happiness.*" Besides, was she not of gentle birth? Her father, Sir Godfrey Rhodes, was of good and ancient family, and never for a moment had he believed but that his suspicions of the child's birth were the result only of a morbid imagination. If the mother was still living and could be discovered this might be placed beyond a doubt, and then Sir Godfrey could have no motive in any longer refusing to acknowledge her as his lawful child.

He resolved to take this matter into consideration, and see if there were any possibility of obtaining a clue to the life or death of the wretched woman who had caused so much misery.

CHAPTER II.

AT THE TOMB.

AND so day by day Ethel's image crept closer and closer into his heart and grew dearer and dearer to it. And this love scarcely seemed a new birth, but rather as the awaking of something that had long slumbered. One day when he and his sister were alone she asked very abruptly, without any preface or warning, "Who is this young girl, this Ethel?"

The question took him so by surprise that he could make no reply for several moments. But embarrassment soon gave way to annoyance that she should seek to pry into his private affairs, and he answered very coldly, "That is a question which Lady Wentworth could not have answered and never put to me."

"Indeed!" she said, the expression of her face growing yet more severe.

Wentworth resumed the perusal of the book he was reading, and Mistress Elizabeth went on with her embroidery work.

"Do not you think, brother," she continues after several minutes' silence, "that all this is very strange?"

"What is very strange?" he demanded, his colour rising.

But she, not heeding these signs of the gathering storm, resumed in the same cold measured tone, "To have under your protection a young and tolerably handsome female

whom no one knows, concerning whom you hold such strange secrecy and whom you treat as though she were *your own child*."

Wentworth started at those last words, and replied, not without some signs of disturbance, "Ethel is the daughter of a gentleman of honour; she was confided to my care by him; I am not at liberty to satisfy curiosity by speaking further."

"I do not speak for curiosity," she answered, still unmoved, "but for the unseemliness of your conduct."

"Unseemliness!" he echoed, his eyes beginning to glow.

"Ay, your unseemly familiarity," she said.

"Your words are ill chosen, sister," he answered, becoming cold again; "we are as we have been since she was a little child and climbed upon my knee, just such an one as my little Arabella is now; my wife in her last hours commended my children to her protection, for Ethel was very very dear to her, as—she is to me."

"So it would seem," replied the other, dryly, "for she plays the part of mistress of your household; your servants and your children seem to so regard her."

"Do they or does she show you less deference than beseems them?"

"You do not choose to understand me; it is not of myself I speak, but there are slanderous tongues in the world."

"Who has dared to couple slander with her name?" he cried.

"I have heard no one, and it is little probable that I shall; but the world will gossip, even about my Lord President."

"What then would *you* have me do?" he demanded.

"Send her back to her father if he be living, or place her under the care of some grave and trustworthy lady, if you must still continue to be her guardian."

"Thank you for your good counsel, sister; I will well consider it."

She looked up at him sharply, for there was something peculiar in the tone in which these words were uttered; but he had already turned to leave the room.

Mistress Elizabeth's remarks were not without reason; nor

were they thrown away, for they revealed to Wentworth his relations to Ethel in a new light. So insensibly, as do all children, had she developed into girlhood and womanhood, that it had never entered his thoughts that time must alter the aspect of their positions, and that this was more especially the case since Lady Wentworth's death. While she lived and treated Ethel as a sister the most slanderous tongue must be silent ; but now evil thinkers might indeed choose to put évil construction upon their unrestrained intercourse. Her honour was as dear to him as his own, and must be guarded from the faintest shadow of suspicion, and this could scarcely be did she continue to remain under the same roof. But how and where to bestow her? And then to deprive himself of that dear companionship which had become to him his only happiness ! But such a consideration as the last would not long bias a mind so firm as his, and resigning himself to the necessity of duty he cast about in his thoughts for the means of discharging it.

The effect of these reflections was a restraint in his behaviour towards her which amounted to coldness, and the breaking off of those evening rambles which had become so delightful to both. Ethel, whose extremely sensitive nature instinctively felt the least variation of temper or mood in those with whom she associated, could not be insensible to the change. She feared she had in some way unconsciously offended him, and at times he caught a half-questioning half-appealing look on her face that almost broke down the barriers he had raised ; he saw that she was unhappy, and he knew that his coldness was the cause. But these restraints did but increase his love for her, as half-smothered flames always burst forth with increased violence.

Mistress Elizabeth viewed these effects of her counsel with extreme satisfaction. Her pride had been hurt by the greater love and deference shown on all sides to this young and unknown girl, and her prudence was alarmed by the hold which she had evidently gained upon her brother and his children. Under such circumstances it was but woman's nature to triumph in the check she believed she had given.

In the meantime another summer had passed away and it was now September.

About two miles distant from Woodhouse was the ancient parish church in which the dead Wentworths and

their wives had been laid for many generations, and thither once in every week Ethel was accustomed to repair to lay fresh flowers upon the stone under which reposed her dear lady. Wentworth had usually accompanied her, and this had been to both the saddest yet sweetest hour out of the seven days. For the last two or three weeks, however, since the restraint had sprung up between them, she had gone alone. One delicious September evening she quitted Woodhouse unattended, with her small basket containing such flowers as the waning season afforded for a walk through the wood to the old church of which both she and Wentworth had a private key.

My lord had gone away at daybreak that morning to a distant part of the country upon some business connected with Popish recusants. He was not expected to return until the next day, but when he had nearly reached the end of his journey he was met by a messenger sent forward to stop him and to announce that the difficulty was over and that the culprits had given in to his authority. So he turned his horse's head and rode back again. His way homeward lay within half a mile of the church, and upon arriving at the opening of a narrow road which led straight thither, he bethought him he had not paid his customary visit to her tomb. "Am I then already forgetting her?" was his thought. Dismounting, and giving his horse to his attendants, whom he dismissed, he pursued the path alone and on foot.

The rays of the setting sun were crimsoning with a blaze of fire the large stained-glass window presented by some dead Wentworth, and glowing upon the gray lichen-stained tower of the old Norman church, and empurpling the dark woods which half encircled it. It was a solitary spot, with only here and there a distant farmhouse in sight. There had been formerly a monastery attached to the church; it had been destroyed by the ruthless last Henry but its ruins still lent a picturesqueness to the place. He advanced to the little low-browed door in the rear of the edifice by which he entered on these occasions. He was about to insert his key when he found that the lock was already possessed by one. Some one was in the church then, and that some one at this hour of the day could only be Ethel.

His first impulse was to retreat, for should they return home together his sister, and perhaps others, might suspect a

secret assignation, a thought from which he shrank with all the sensitiveness of his punctilious honour. Still he lingered. After all it *might* be only the sexton or the clerk preparing for the service next day, which was Sunday. The Wentworth vault was at the other end of the building; by gently pushing open the door he might look in and ascertain who was there without being seen by Ethel, if it were indeed she. It yielded noiselessly to his hand.

Yes, there she was, kneeling upon the stones in prayer and quite unconscious of an intruding presence. Above her was the great memorial window, and through the figures of prophets and angels streamed the glowing sunlight, staining the tomb of the Wentworths with purple and crimson fire, gleaming like a halo upon her head, and lighting up the supplicating face with a heavenly radiance. So wrapt and motionless was she in her orisons that she might have been the kneeling figure of some saint carved in marble, but for the black dress which made the surpassing fairness of her skin and the golden beauty of her hair stand out in that strong light with such wonderful distinctness. Three parts of her face were turned towards him, and perhaps never before had he contemplated it so attentively and unrestrainedly; never before had his eyes so drunk in its loveliness; but the divine beatitude of her countenance, the deep silence and solitude that reigned through the gray Norman aisles, the solemnity of the situation, awed and purified all earthly passion, for he could almost believe the spirit of his dead wife was present hovering above that kneeling form that it had loved so well in life.

Absorbed and enthralled he stood wrapt in this contemplation until the figure moved to rise. Starting to make his retreat the handle of his sword struck against the door with a sound that echoed through the stillness; he heard Ethel's faint cry of fear; he saw her startled face turned towards him—saw that he was discovered—and hurried down the aisle towards her.

"Have I terrified you?" he inquired, taking her hand.

"Just a little," she answered with a faint smile; and he could feel her pulse beating quickly and see her cheek alternately flush and pale.

"I am so grieved," he said. "As I was returning homewards I thought I would pay a duty I fear I have neglected

of late. You were so absorbed in your devotion you did not hear the door open, and I would not disturb you until you had finished."

"I will leave you, my lord," she said, hurriedly, "or night will overtake me before I reach Woodhouse."

Had their souls communicated through the electrical sympathy of touch, that she, who had always been so free and unembarrassed with him, should thus suddenly evince such disturbance?

"No, dear Ethel," he answered, "remain; I will conduct you home."

"*Dear Ethel!*" He had never used that term before, not even in her childish days; and the clasp of his hand seemed to thrill her.

"I had better go, my lord," she said, still nervously. "I walk well and shall be home before dark."

"Are you then frightened to remain with me?" he asked, holding her hand yet more firmly.

"Frightened to remain with you, my lord!" she cried, wondering at the strangeness of the question, "oh no."

"Then stay and pray with me," he said with deep earnestness; "supplicate for a blessing upon the prayer I am about to offer up, for *it concerns you.*"

Marvelling at his words and manner, so unlike anything she had observed in him before, but never dreaming of disputing his wish, she knelt down beside him and again lifted up her soul to God to bless her benefactor and grant his every wish.

But had she known the subject of his supplication, had she known that his soul was calling upon the spirit of his dead wife to bless the resolve he had just taken to carry out her dying wish, she would scarcely have knelt there so calmly.

His prayer was long and fervent; and there was a deep vein of religious feeling in Wentworth's character, which, as he never paraded it, was known only to his most intimate associates.

When he had finished the sun was set, the crimsons and purples had faded away, and the gray shadows were creeping to their nightly rest beneath the ponderous arches. As she rose he took her hand, drew her towards him, and imprinted a kiss upon her forehead; then without a word he led her out of the church and locked the door.

The sun had left behind a trail of crimson fire that cast a ruddy glow over the green fields and the dark woods; the stars were coming out of the bright sapphire above their heads, and the hunting moon, effulgent as a winter's sun was rising behind the trees blending her yellow light with the deeper glow of the west. The air was cool and fresh, and the solemn silence of the delicious eventide was broken only by the distant tinkle of a sheep-bell and the drowsy caw of a few belated rooks.

They went slowly on, he with his eyes bent upon the ground, she all wonder and perturbation but with a strange exaltation of spirit inspired by her recent devotions and by the deep solitude and stillness of the hour. Without another word being spoken they entered into the deepening twilight of the woods and proceeded until they came to a spot which had been a favourite resort of Lady Wentworth's. It was a pretty dell just off the path embosomed by trees and shrubs; there was a mound in the centre, at the foot of which bubbled a spring forming a rivulet that had worn itself a channel among the moss and lichens. Thither on many a summer day she had come to pass the hot hours in delicious coolness. So fond was she of the place that her husband had caused a carved seat to be brought thither for her use.

"Let us sit here and rest awhile," said Wentworth, leading Ethel to the seat and placing himself beside her.

"Ethel," he said, after a pause, holding her hand fast clasped in his, "do you know this night is destined to be a turning-point in both our lives!—that both our futures will be ever after influenced by the words which will be spoken ere we quit this spot! Therefore look well into your heart before you answer my questions, and if you cannot find the answers ready let them rest awhile."

He paused as though expecting a reply, but none came; there was a throbbing in her throat that choked all speech.

Upon the path without there was still a bright patch of daylight, but beneath that leafy roof all was gray dimness; the twitter of a dreaming bird and the low night-wind creeping among the foliage, as though seeking a resting-place for the dark hours were the only sounds.

"You know how my dear lady loved you," he resumed, after a silence that seemed to Ethel as though it would never be broken, "yet you cannot know how deeply. Do you

remember a little time before she died that she requested you and all to leave the room so that she might be alone with me to tell me her last wishes? Well, all that passed between us, all those last wishes related to you. Do you hear me, Ethel?" he asked, after again pausing for a reply.

Even in that silence he could scarcely hear the faint "Yes." Yet he could feel in her quivering fingers how deeply his words were moving her.

But here his own intense agitation stopped his utterance, and again there was silence. The day was fading fast on the path without, but through the thick foliage came gleams of the rising moon, and one ray fell like a broad silver band across Ethel's dress, leaving her face in darkness; the restless wind still crept among the leaves with faint sighings of weariness.

"Ethel, dear Ethel," he went on at last, but in a voice trembling and indistinct; "her last wish was that you should take her place—be her children's second mother—my wife."

There was a mist before her eyes and for a second consciousness seemed leaving her. At that moment a wood-lark almost close beside them began to pour forth his sweet thrilling night-song.

Now that the all-important revelation was made, he could conquer much of his agitation and speak more fluently.

"There have been few hours since in which those words have been out of my memory. I have thought over them, weighed them, and to-night when I knelt upon her tomb it was to pray her wishes might be fulfilled."

"Am I in a dream?" murmured Ethel, pressing her hands over her eyes. "I your wife!"

"Ay, if you will," he answered softly, stealing his arm about her; "for I have learned to love you as that dear saint now in heaven would have me love you."

There was a brief silence, which Ethel broke with low murmurs, speaking rather to herself than to him, and with her face still covered.

"You love me!—you make me your wife!—I, a poor nameless orphan, the creature of your bounty—I, who did not think myself worthy of Launcelot Franklin—I become YOUR wife!"

At the name of Launcelot a jealous shadow crossed his face and his arm fell from her waist.

"Did you—do you then love this Launcelot Franklin?" he asked, his voice growing cold.

Finding she gave no immediate answer, he continued in the same tone—

"That is a question you must duly weigh. I would not bias your inclination, and neither for my happiness nor yours would I accept your heart if one shadow of regret lingered in it for another. When you are in the solitude of your own chamber and you are looking down into the depths of your heart for the answer, keep this one question ever before you, for it will assist you much in rightly deciphering what you shall read there: Were I and Launcelot Franklin each kneeling before you now, each pressing his suit, which would you sooner take for your husband, he or Thomas Wentworth?"

As he uttered the last words she involuntarily turned her face, to which the silver band of moonlight had risen, full upon him. It was one of those spontaneous movements in which the soul reveals itself untrammelled by reason or reflection. Wentworth could not have told what he read there, it was too subtle to be defined even in thought; but he clasped her to his heart in a long trembling embrace, whispering in her ear, "Your answer in words, dearest, to-morrow."

Then rising and again clasping her hand firmly in his, he moved forwards towards the house.

They had not proceeded far before they heard voices and footsteps in advance of them, and immediately afterwards two men came in sight, who proved to be servants from Woodhouse coming to seek for Ethel, for her protracted absence had begun to excite alarm.

Upon arriving at the house they were met in the hall by Mistress Elizabeth; her face fell when she saw Wentworth and Ethel enter together.

"I thought you were alone," she said, addressing the latter. "Had I known you were under such good a protection I should have been spared much uneasiness."

By Ethel, who was like one in a dream and only half conscious of what was passing around, the sting of these words was unfelt; and with a few unintelligible excuses for

the alarm she had occasioned, she hurried away to her own chamber.

The peculiarity of her manner, her flushed cheeks, her air of distraction, the strange brightness of her eyes, and the nervous tremor over all, did not escape the elder lady's lynx eyes and filled her with suspicions.

"As I was returning homeward," said Wentworth, by way of explanation, "I went into the church to visit Lady Wentworth's tomb, as you know is my weekly custom; there I found Ethel, and so we returned together."

Mistress Elizabeth made no reply, the servants being present, and he carefully avoided meeting her *en tête-à-tête* that night.

CHAPTER III.

ETHEL'S LOVE.

ALONE within her chamber for the night Ethel extinguished her lamp, threw open her casement and sat down beside it. The moon was shining with the brilliance of day in the clear, cloudless sky, making the whole earth white and black. She could see the lights from the windows beneath shining out upon the silver gray of the night ; and the hum of the domestics from their quarters beneath, the sound of opening and shutting doors, came up to break the solemn stillness of the woods.

It was all so sudden, so unexpected, so unreal, that my Lord Wentworth, whom as a child she had worshipped with such an awful reverence, whom as a woman she had regarded as a being so far above other men that he was to her what some demigod might have been to a pagan devotee ; that he, my Lord President, before whose frown the proudest and haughtiest trembled—that he, upon the outpourings of whose, as it appeared to her, exhaustless mind and eloquent tongue she had hung so many hours as wrapt and absorbed as Eve might have been to the utterances of the Archangel Michael—that HE should ask her to become his wife ! As soon would she have expected an angel from heaven to stoop to her love as he. What an ecstasy thrilled her whole being at the thought ; the infinity of her happiness was almost more than she could sustain ! She had never in her life passed out of the circle wherein he was omnipotent. From

her earliest remembrance the language and demeanour of all around had impressed her with the idea that he was a being superior in all things to the rest of mankind ; the devotion of both his wives, the unquestioning obedience of his dependents, the enthusiastic praises of Mr. Greenwood, the awe and terror which even the bare thought of his anger inspired, all had combined to create a kind of ecstatic worship in the breast of the passionate and imaginative child and woman.

In the midst of her reverie there rose up Launcelot's pale reproachful face as she had last seen it, and the memory of his parting words, "Though it be years before we meet again, you may be as sure as that the sun will rise that my heart is unchanged and *still hopes*." But she knew now that she had never loved him with more than sisterly affection ; that my lord's image had ever so filled her heart and imagination that there had been room for no other.

And this worship was tainted by no shadow of earthly passion or ambition, but was solely the offspring of a pure but perhaps excessive exaltation of mind.

Hour after hour was tolled by the great clock, and still she sat there wrapt in her inward contemplations, and the stars were fading and the dawn was breaking in the east ere she sought her pillow.

The effects of this vigil could be seen that morning at breakfast in her pale cheeks and swollen eyes.

"You look as if you had not slept well," observed Mistress Elizabeth, eyeing her coldly.

Ethel looked confused, but answered simply, "I have not."

"When you take the children for their morning exercise, Ethel," said Wentworth, "I will go with you, as I wish to speak to you alone."

His haughty mind would not permit even the appearance of a secret assignation ; would admit no deference to other will than his own, and thus it was he made their appointment openly.

The eyes of Mistress Elizabeth were fixed upon Ethel, who turned from pale to red, and red to pale, more quickly than the words can be written. She could scarcely restrain the expression of her anger at what she regarded as the

barefaced audacity of this proceeding. But it aroused her curiosity, suggested foul suspicions, and she resolved to set a spy upon them.

She had a personal attendant, a cunning stealthy woman who had been with her many years, whom all the other domestics disliked. Those who were in the secrets of the lady's earlier life pretended that Sibyl, such was the woman's name, had done services for her mistress that she would not have cared for the world to know. Be that as it may she was deep in her confidence. It was this woman she set to dog the footsteps of Wentworth and Ethel.

And so, never suspecting this espionage, they left the house together, the children as usual gambolling before them. Their footsteps almost instinctively sought the direction of their last night's resting-place, and until they arrived there neither spoke one word upon the subject which filled their thoughts. The way they had taken was thickly wooded; the spy was an adept at the business, and within a few minutes after they had taken their seats she glided round the dell, and crept beneath a thick bush whence she could see and hear all.

The children, too young to understand anything that passed, played upon the grass in the hollow.

Then Wentworth spoke. "And now, darling, for your answer." He took her hand, and his voice was full of tenderness, but with something of anxiety in it, although he had read enough of her heart to be almost certain what the answer would be. "I beseech you," he went on, "let the answer come direct from your heart without thought of me. If you have found there a stronger love for Launcelot Franklin than you can give to me tell me so simply and directly. I will not be less your friend than I have ever been because no dearer tie can bind us, and I will do all in my power to make you happy."

"I love Launcelot as a brother, but no more," she answered.

Her voice so trembled she could scarcely articulate those simple words.

"And you will be *my* wife?" he asked, drawing her closer and closer to him.

"If you think me worthy of you," she murmured, sinking at his feet.

"Ay, worthy of the greatest king on earth," he cried, raising and folding her in his arms.

And so he held her, gazing into her eyes, his own full of love, until she hid her blushing face against his shoulder.

"I cannot yet believe it is true," she sighed, half swooning with excess of happiness; "it seems so strange that you could find aught in me worthy of your love."

"A chaste mind, a loving heart, a disposition all goodness—what more should a prince seek in a wife?"

A grateful blushing look was all the answer she could make.

"And now, dearest," he resumed after a pause, "all this must remain secret between us two until next year; and until that time the reverence we owe to the memory of her who is in heaven must suppress all reference to this betrothal—for so I regard it—even between ourselves; so that each of us will resume our former position towards one another as though nothing of this had taken place. Guard our secret well from every prying ear, for the world is ever ready to be uncharitable in its judgments. I may even find it necessary, unless I make stay in London, to send you from Woodhouse for a time; you would not object?"

"Your will, my lord, has ever been my law," she answered meekly, "and now more than ever must it be so."

"There is a question I would ask of you," she went on, after a little hesitation, "one which I have long long desired to solve, yet could never find the courage to put."

"Speak fearlessly, and if I am able to answer it I will," he replied, encouragingly.

"It is—concerning—my parents," she faltered. "Tell me, do you know them?"

"I have known your father well."

"And my mother? Ah, you are silent," she cried, her earnestness overcoming her timidity; "is there, then——"

The words died away upon her lips.

But he understood their meaning, and it revealed to him what he had never before suspected—the secret care that had been gnawing at her heart.

"My poor child!" he said, pityingly, "I should have thought of this before. I might have known that so tender and sensitive a heart could not have been insensible to this mystery. Your birth is gentle and honourable, of that I can assure you."

"I thank God for that!" she cried, earnestly.

"For the rest, an oath of secrecy closes my lips, from which I am even now devising the means to be released. As soon as I succeed you shall know all."

"At your own good time, my lord," she answered. "If I am stainless in your eyes what more should I seek to know?"

"My darling!" he murmured.

At that moment the two children tired of their play crept up to Ethel; the younger climbed upon her lap, while the elder rested his little head against her knee.

"Henceforth they are yours," he whispered lovingly.

She clasped them to her bosom and wept sweet and bitter tears over them.

When they had gone the spy emerged from her hiding-place, filled with wonder at what she had heard.

"This will be rare news for my lady," she muttered; "she does not suspect *this*."

CHAPTER IV

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

UPON entering the hall Wentworth found a messenger bearing a letter waiting his return. The superscription was in a delicate female hand.

"From whom do you bring this?" he inquired as he drew his dagger to cut the blue silk string with which it was fastened.

"From Lady Carlisle, my lord," was the answer.

"From Lady Carlisle!" he repeated, starting.

His disturbance was so apparent that Ethel who was still beside him could not help observing it.

His hand trembled as he opened the missive and read these lines:

"MY DEAR LORD,—Being on my way to the far north to visit one of my estates from which I have long been absent, I dare to assume the privilege of an old friend to beg your hospitality for a day or two.

"LUCY CARLISLE."

His face darkened.

"Where is your lady now?" he demanded of the messenger.

"Where we rested last night, my lord, at an inn about twelve miles from here."

"Return thither, present to her Lord Wentworth's humble

respects and tell her that his poor house, such as it is, is wholly hers to command."

The man raised his hat and departed, while Wentworth hastened to acquaint his sister of the coming of this unexpected and distinguished visitor.

In a few moments the whole household was in a bustle of preparation, in the midst of which Sibyl, the spy, sought out her mistress.

"I cannot listen to you now," said Mistress Elizabeth, putting her aside; "by-and-by, by-and-by," and hurried away without waiting to hear one of the eager words that were trembling upon her lips.

"Who is this great lady?" inquired Ethel, anxiously.

"One whom I wish were a thousand miles off," he answered, turning away.

"How angry he looks," thought Ethel; "what can it mean?"

The darkness of night was slowly creeping over a dull rainy sky when the unwelcome visitors were sighted approaching the house. There was a retinue of some eighteen to twenty persons, chiefly male attendants in handsome liveries, together with led horses bearing baggage. The lady herself, however, was borne by four men on foot in a litter elegantly draped with blue velvet; this being the usual mode of travelling used by ladies of high quality, the condition of the roads in the more remote parts of the country rendering coach travelling scarcely endurable. A carriage, however, a heavy lumbering vehicle but gorgeously painted, followed in her train.

It had been many a day since there had been such bustle and confusion in the courtyard of Woodhouse, and the Yorkshire tykes stared with open-mouthed wonderment at the courtly attendants (several of whom were Frenchmen and Italians) in their belaced, beruffled, and beslashed costumes, all cut in the newest and most extravagant fashions; their dull brains were confused by the jabber of tongues, the orders and counter-orders, and the quickness of movement so foreign to their inertia.

When the lady alighted from her litter, Wentworth advanced bareheaded, according to the ceremonious custom of the age, to welcome her. She received his studied and polite welcome with one of her most bewitching smiles, and

tenderly pressed the hand that conducted her up the steps leading into the house. At the entrance stood Mistress Elizabeth, with the female domestics ranged behind her. She knew Lady Carlisle well ; had met her frequently at Court. The Countess was most demonstrative towards her, pretending great joy at the meeting. Mistress Elizabeth's vanity was pleased with this exuberant notice from so distinguished a personage and quite warmed beneath it. Near the foot of the staircase back in the shadow stood Ethel, watching the scene with deep interest. Wentworth, catching sight of her, advanced and taking her hand led her forward and presented her to Lady Carlisle.

"My ward, Mistress Ethel," he said.

The Countess started with a look of surprise, which was immediately succeeded by a frown. She had never heard of such a person.

Ethel shrank back before the haughty and almost disdainful stare. Not a look had been lost upon Wentworth, who, to put an end to an embarrassing pause, again offered his hand with a profound bow to his guest and conducted her up the stairs.

"What a handsome girl !" she said. "Who is she ?"

"My ward," he answered in a tone that repelled further questions.

The Countess felt disconcerted.

When she went to make her toilette Mistress Elizabeth led the way to the chamber set apart for her.

"Who is that young maiden ?"

"An orphan, I believe, whom my brother has reared from childhood," was the reply.

The tone in which these words were spoken convinced the Countess there was some mystery, but she could not put any further questions as several attendants were present.

The noble banqueting-room presented a grand appearance at supper that night, the table laden with massive plate the old-fashioned style of which excited the supercilious smiles of the London attendants ; the great number of domestics, which almost crowded the spacious apartment ; the soft light of huge wax candles, kept only for such great occasions ; and the red smoky glare of the torches held by a row of servants in the background formed a scene exceedingly striking. Superb and queen-like Lady Carlisle sat the central figure of

all, eclipsing even the stately form of Wentworth himself : her ravishing toilette of blue and silver glittering with gems ; her luxuriant dark hair dressed with consummate skill in the Henrietta Maria style and surmounted by a coronet of rubies and brilliants ; the free elegance of her manner, her animated conversation, her sallies of wit, strikingly contrasted with the mourning dresses of the other two ladies, with the stiff antiquated plainness of Mistress Elizabeth and the undecorated simplicity of Ethel.

During the meal Wentworth could not help comparing the two beautiful faces so opposite to each other, the one owing so much to art, yet so enchanting in the mobility of its features and its varying shades of expression which rendered it almost Protean ; the other all nature, so gentle and almost childlike in its pure beauty. Perhaps at times the thought would obtrude itself that that brilliant woman of the world would have been a wife more suited to his high position than the unsophisticated country maiden he had selected. But such unwelcome reflections were immediately corrected by the remembrance of how poorly this great lady would play the part of the domestic wife, and to him the calm delights of home were far above the artificial life of the Court, which was always repugnant to him. He was unusually silent, and Lady Carlisle with all her efforts could not draw him into conversation. Thus the two ladies had nearly all the talk to themselves. Mistress Elizabeth listened with eager interest to the Court news and Court scandal which the Countess gave with such piquancy and satire. But although addressing the elder lady she frequently directed sharp scrutinising glances upon Ethel, who was listening with a mixture of wonderment and doubtful admiration to the jargon and fashionable slang of the day of which she could comprehend but little.

With all her brilliancy Lady Carlisle's spirits were forced, and at times it was an effort to her to prevent them flagging. Not for an instant did the idea of a rival enter her imagination, or if it had she would have scouted it as the most preposterous of fancies ; yet there was something in Mistress Elizabeth's manner that had given her a vague feeling of uneasiness, and she resolved as early as possible next day to seek a little private conversation with that lady and elicit from her some explanation. Not until ten o'clock, a very

late hour for Woodhouse at that season of the year, did the company rise to retire for the night.

"I fear you will find Woodhouse very dull and dreary after Whitehall," observed Mistress Elizabeth. "I am given to understand that the Court of King Charles greatly exceeds in splendour that of his royal father."

"Infinitely so," replied the Countess, "but its very brilliance and unceasing round of gaiety palls at length upon the spirits, and after being so long surrounded by art we get a longing desire for nature. I love the country, and courtier as I am I love country sports. I have not been so long at Court that I have forgotten to hunt, as I hope to prove to you all. Your fresh bracing northern air has already given me new life. Do you remember, my lord," she asked, turning to Wentworth, "that not long since I reproved you for what I then called wasting your time in the country. Even the short time I have been here I have changed my opinion, and believe that in a little while I shall grow as fond of it as you."

"And cozen us poor Yorkshire clowns into the belief that Diana herself had descended among our barren woods," replied Wentworth, gallantly.

"How beautiful she is and how wonderfully she talks!" thought Ethel as she was preparing for bed. "She and my lord seem to have known each other for a long long time, and she is just such an one as I could fancy for his wife; how far more suited to him than I! Strange that he should not have chosen her."

When Sibyl was alone with her mistress, unrobing her for the night, she related all that she had seen and heard in the woods. At first the lady indignantly refused to believe the story; she must have mistaken the meaning of what she had overheard. My Lord Wentworth make *her* his wife! Preposterous! At length the woman's persistency forced the truth upon her. She never dreamed of more than a *liaison*; this news was terrible—overwhelming. An alliance so degrading must be hindered at any cost. But how? Ay, there was the difficulty, for who could hope to bend that inflexible will?—who could dare even to remonstrate with him when he had once made his decision? Elizabeth was deeply attached to her brother; she was proud of his genius, of his high position, of the honour he

did the name of Wentworth, and her ambitious imaginings beheld a ducal coronet hovering over his head; and was all this to be shared with a nameless country girl without fortune or family and whose very parentage he was ashamed to declare! The appearance of Lady Carlisle at Woodhouse, and her tender and effusive manner towards him, had awakened old hopes of that alliance which she had formerly so eagerly desired and even intrigued to bring about, and which, unless she was much mistaken, the young widow would now gladly make.

What if she were to take her into confidence? Her quick wit might suggest some means of breaking off this *mésalliance*. At all events she would sound her upon the subject. Such were the thoughts that kept the lady wakeful during the greater part of that night.

CHAPTER V

PLOTTING.

A HUNT had been arranged for the next morning, but the weather proving rainy, Wentworth in deference to his lady visitor offered to postpone it. But of this she would not hear.

"I am not so delicate that the rain will melt me like a sugar toy," she said, gaily. She proved herself quite an Amazon in the saddle, dashing fearlessly over every obstacle, keeping abreast with the boldest riders, and was one of the first in at the death. The huntsmen were in ecstasies at her daring and applauded her to the echo; the clowns and domestics were filled with admiration and amazement at the doings of the great Court lady, and to complete their satisfaction she scattered largesses among them with queen-like munificence.

Attired in a green velvet riding costume laced with gold, fitting faultlessly to her shape so as to show off every undulation of her glorious figure; a hat to match with a drooping plume of ostrich feathers from beneath which her glossy hair flowed in graceful ringlets; her cheeks flushed with exercise, her eyes flashing with excitement, her whole face lit up with pleasure at the universal admiration of which she was the cynosure, she was indeed a worthy presentment of the divine huntress to whom Wentworth had compared her. Again the spell of the siren was stealing over him.

But he was not destined to be long exposed to it on the present occasion.

Towards evening on that very day there arrived a courier bearing a mandate from the King, who required my Lord Wentworth's presence at Whitehall as speedily as horse could bring him thither, "to consult with him upon certain weighty matters connected with the well-being of the realm." Pleasure at this opening of an escape from Lady Carlisle's Circean influence was dashed by the thought that she would still remain at Woodhouse, a reflection which occasioned him some uneasiness, although he could scarcely define the cause. However, there was no time for consideration; the summons was imperative and must be instantly obeyed; by daybreak the next morning he must commence his journey to London.

Lady Carlisle could not conceal her mortification at the news of his departure; as he had half suspected, her journey had been a ruse to attack him in his home, and now she found that her clever stratagem, to carry out which she had undertaken such a terrible journey, had ignominiously collapsed at the very moment when she was rejoicing over its success, and she was thus placed in a far worse position than if she had remained at home. She determined, however, as quickly as decency would permit, to follow him back to London.

"Pray make Woodhouse your home as long as its rudeness and dulness are endurable," he said, as they parted that night.

"I thank you," she answered "but I had no intention from the first of trespassing upon your hospitality longer than two or three days. I cannot but regret my brief stay should not have been in your company, but I trust we shall soon meet again."

And so with a low sigh, a gentle pressure of the hand and a tender look she left him.

He greatly desired to speak a few words apart to Ethel, but Mistress Elizabeth took care to prevent this by never leaving her side, and he did not desire to draw marked attention by any appearance of secrecy or private understanding between them. Ethel too would have loved to have spoken to him alone, for she felt a strange depression at his departure, a feeling as it were of impending evil. She could not sleep

that night, and just as the gray dawn was stealing through her chamber-window she heard the bustle and clatter of horses' hoofs in the courtyard below that announced the departure. Jumping out of bed and wrapping a loose robe about her she quietly opened the casement and watched the proceedings below. As soon as the attendants who were to accompany him were mounted and ready, she saw Wentworth's favourite horse, a magnificent roan, led forth, and shortly afterwards my lord himself appeared wrapped in a heavy riding-cloak, his head covered by a black slouched hat, the only ornament of which was a single black ostrich feather; as he leaped into the saddle she saw his face raised towards her window; she waved her hand in farewell. He caught sight of the white arm, although he could not see the face for the thick ivy that clustered about it, and answered by raising his hat. More than once, as long as the house was in sight, did he turn his head in that direction, and she strained her eyes to catch every parting glimpse of the beloved form until the tears and the gray mists had wholly hidden it; then she closed the casement and sat down and wept with a heavy heart.

Lady Carlisle's love was not strong enough to keep her awake on that occasion, and she slept soundly until Wentworth was many miles away from Woodhouse. She arose sullen and ill-humoured, and desired that her breakfast should be brought her in her own room. A great change had seemingly come over her ideas since the previous night, for whereas then everything around was most delightful everything was now equally distasteful; she looked out upon the woods half veiled in mist and shuddered at the dulness; she glanced around her chamber and vowed it was not fit for her groom to sleep in; the viands were coarse, the wine was indifferent, the ale muddy, for ladies in that age partook of such potent beverages even for breakfast; she scolded her servants, ordered a fire to be kindled, wrapped a dressing-robe about her, vowed she would not leave her room that day and ordered all to be prepared for her departure the next morning.

In the midst of these humours Mistress Elizabeth presented herself to pay her respects; but my lady, now that *male* eyes were no longer watching, received her but coldly, made numerous complaints and declared her intention of

leaving on the next day. Far from being mortified at this reception it gave Elizabeth much satisfaction, since, divining the cause, it seemed to prove the lady's inclination for her brother; so she patiently waited for this fretful humour to exhaust itself before opening the subject that she had come to discuss.

She began by bringing up reminiscences of the past, by references to the old days when, as she phrased it, she had fondly hoped that they would have been sisters.

"My brother cannot remain single after his season of mourning is expired," she went on; "he will require a lady to do the honours of his house. I had hoped that he would make some noble alliance such as his great and yet greater prospective fortune should warrant, but my hopes I fear are in danger."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Countess, aroused by these words.

Elizabeth made a sign to her to dismiss her attendants.

"You asked me when you first arrived about that young girl Ethel," she said, when they were alone.

"Ah yes!" cried Lady Carlisle eagerly.

"Concerning her family, her origin, I can tell you nothing; but I have made a terrible discovery in connection with her."

"Indeed, what is that?" inquired my lady, on tiptoe with curiosity.

"That my brother, Lord Wentworth, has engaged himself to wed her at the end of his mourning."

"What!" almost shrieked Lady Carlisle leaping to her feet; "you are mad, dreaming; what proof have you?"

"My own maid, Sibyl, overheard him solemnly betroth himself to her on the very day you arrived here."

"Is that all?" laughed the visitor scornfully. "Shakespeare tells us that when the blood burns the tongue is prodigal; all men are lavish of promises to women when it suits their purpose. But, nevertheless, I'd have the creature driven into the woods and whipt by the huntsmen."

"You are too hasty, Lady Carlisle," answered Mistress Elizabeth coldly, for her now severe morals could not endure to hear a supposed sin treated with such levity; "this young woman has been under my brother's protection from childhood; she was treated by Lady Wentworth as a sister, and

Lord Wentworth would be incapable of deceiving the daughter of the meanest hind upon his estate, much less one that has so strong a claim upon his honour. As to driving her out, who would dare even to offer a word of insult to her while under my lord's guardianship?"

"I would!" cried Lady Carlisle, bursting into fury; "I would scourge her!—flay her baby face with my own fingers!—kill her!—ere Thomas Wentworth should so disgrace himself!"

Even iron-nerved Mistress Elizabeth was appalled by the ferocity of her words and looks. Could this be the smiling, gentle, languishing beauty, all graciousness and tenderness, of a few hours' back!

"Hush, hush, my dear Lady Carlisle, the servants will hear you," she exclaimed. "I thought we might advise together and perhaps think of some way to avert this threatened calamity; but passion will effect nothing."

"It shall be averted," cried the other, pacing up and down the chamber like a caged tigress; "great as you are, Thomas Wentworth, you shall not play the fool with me, and above all for this nameless creature whom I would not entertain among my menials."

"Calm yourself, calm yourself, I beseech you," entreated Elizabeth, who began almost to repent her confidence. "The thought of such an union is as terrible to me as it is to you, although I have more control over my feelings; and there are no means I would hesitate to resort to, so that no harm or sorrow came to my brother, to prevent it."

In a little while the paroxysm had exhausted itself and the virago became cooler.

For a time the conversation was desultory and interrupted by an occasional outburst of Lady Carlisle's temper; Mistress Elizabeth had conceived a scheme which she was cautious in unfolding while her companion was in her present excited state.

"With my brother nothing can be done," she said; "from his boyhood, once resolved upon any course of action neither prayers, threats, nor reasonings could ever turn him aside from it, and years have but confirmed this stubbornness of disposition."

"Then what can be done?" demanded Lady Carlisle,

impatiently ; "if you have any plan to propose explain it without further preface."

"There is only one hope," pursued the other, "and that lies in Ethel herself."

"What do you mean?"

"To so work upon her that she should break off this marriage of her own will."

"If that be your plan you can put it aside at once," replied the lady, scornfully. "Is it credible that this poor dependant would of her own will consent to forego her chance of becoming the wife of the King's favourite minister, of being one day a countess or a duchess? Your association with country boors must have sadly dulled your once shrewd intellect, my poor Elizabeth."

"Perhaps so, Lady Carlisle," responded the other, trying to suppress her mortification at this contemptuous tone, yet giving sting for sting ; "while the Court has so corrupted your heart that you cannot believe it possible for any woman to act contrary to her own selfish passions and ambitions. You must remember that this girl also has been brought up among country boors and consequently might be ready to do many things unheard of among courtiers, and for which they would probably dub her fool."

"If her folly would carry her to such a point I should be inclined to dub her idiot," answered the Countess, with a shrug.

"So much the better for you and me—no fools no knaves."

Lady Carlisle for a moment made no response, for she could perceive that her disdainful words and manner were becoming highly offensive to Elizabeth, and reason and cunning, which my lady's arrogant and vindictive temper had for a time cast to the winds, were beginning once more to assert themselves ; she could not afford to break with so powerful an ally. Her scornful features melted into a smile, and extending her hand with well-acted frankness, she said :

"Forgive my rudeness ; but you know my foolish passionate temper before to-day. Now tell me your plan and I promise to listen to it with all patience."

The other held the warm hand for a second between her icy fingers and then let it fall again.

"Well then," she resumed, recovering her composure, "I have closely observed this Ethel during the time I have presided over my brother's household, and I think I have succeeded in reading her character tolerably aright. There is much disinterestedness in it—or, as you would name it, folly—and I do not believe that ambition has any place in her heart; she loves and reverences my brother as a votress does her saint, and could it be shown her that she was doing him wrong and injury by becoming his wife, such is her devotion to him, that I am convinced she would fly to the furthest extremity of the earth to avoid him. Such are my impressions; they may be false, but I think not."

"Then why not at once take advantage of his absence and instil this idea into her mind?"

"That could be best done by you."

"By me?"

"Yes; you were once all but betrothed to my Lord Wentworth; you *still love him*, and if I understand certain words you dropped aright some renewal of the old relations has taken place between you. These hints, improved by your own subtlety, might work wonders upon the sensitive mind of this *silly* girl."

Lady Carlisle reflected for some moments.

"You are right," she said at length. "I can see your plan is excellent, always supposing this rustic fair one is as simple as you believe, which pardon me if I still doubt. It shall be tried, however, and at once."

"I have heard it said," continued Elizabeth, "that there is a young gentleman of the neighbourhood desperately enamoured of her and to whom it would seem she once gave some encouragement."

"Ah, indeed, who is that?" inquired Lady Carlisle, with more interest than she had yet displayed.

"His name is Launcelot Franklin; he fought a duel with young John Savile for having spoken lightly of her, after which the father, a rigid Puritan, interposed and the young man was sent away to London, where I understand he is now a student at one of the Inns of Court."

"I have met John Savile," said Lady Carlisle, musingly. "Pym brought him once to my house; a man with a saturnine, malicious face; he is one of Wentworth's most bitter

and most dangerous enemies. I do not know the other name you mention."

"Think over what I have said," resumed Elizabeth; "I leave it in your hands; you have more subtlety than I, and you have an insinuating smoothness of manner when you choose to assume it to which I can make no pretence."

"It would seem then that I am to be the catspaw to take the Wentworth honour out of the fire," observed Lady Carlisle sarcastically.

"Why not since you wish to possess it?" retorted the other, coldly.

"And you wish to save it; so our interests are mutual. And as you have been pleased to credit me with so much genius for diplomacy I will essay your scheme, and play my part to the best of my ability."

And so they separated, not quite so well pleased with one another as they had been a few hours before.

When she was alone Lady Carlisle summoned her attendants to perform her toilette. She chose her most magnificent dress, her most splendid jewels, for she desired to awe the mind of this unsophisticated maiden by a display of her wealth and rank, to show how infinitely she was above her, how hopeless was her rivalry; she took as much pains in beautifying herself as though she were about to meet a lover. And all the time she was conning over her part, brushing away the last bubbles of her recent ebullition, schooling her features to softness, her mind to hypocrisy.

She did not leave her chamber until the dinner-bell rang. When she descended to the dining-hall it was with a sweet smile upon her lips and a gentle unassuming air that had a wondrous charm in so superb a beauty so superbly dressed. Mistress Elizabeth stared at the metamorphosis in mute astonishment. The other divined her thoughts, and smiled triumphantly; it was a tribute to her genius, her vanity. She placed herself next to Ethel, whom up to that time she had scarcely deigned to notice, and all through the meal directed the conversation to her, chatting with a playful condescending familiarity that quite charmed her intended victim, and all the time her eyes were scanning every feature with a jealous hatred of that beauty which she could not ignore, while her cunning brain was diving into the inmost

depths of that pure transparent mind which had never known or suspected guile.

Mistress Elizabeth quietly watched the scene ; she was a stern merciless woman, who would not perhaps have scrupled to sacrifice the girl's life to preserve what she regarded as the honour of her house, but her mind revolted, her conscience sickened at this Judas-like dissimulation.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FALCON AND THE DOVE.

As soon as Mr. Greenwood had pronounced the grace after meat, Lady Carlisle rose, and, putting her arm round Ethel, said :

“Come with me, dear Ethel, to my chamber and we will have a pleasant talk together, you and I, all alone.”

Wondering at this sudden interest and condescension, but suspecting no harm, Ethel went away with her.

Having dismissed her attendants, Lady Carlisle sat in a large armchair which had been placed for her close to the open window and pointing to a low stool at her feet, said, laughingly :

“You shall sit there and lay your head in my lap and I will fancy myself a gallant cavalier and thou my lady-love, of whom maybe I am jealous—for all lovers are jealous, especially if their mistresses be as beautiful as you, Ethel. And now, tell me, child,” began the dissimulator, caressing the fair head with her jewelled hands, “how many lovers hast thou had before thy sweet blue eyes entranced my heart? Heavens, what a blush! There must be a goodly number to produce a crimson so deep as that. You will not answer? How wouldst thou have me construe thy silence? Does it mean avowal or denial? Still silent! Suppose, now, I had learned the secret from some great magician—say Dr. Dee—of reading the names of maidens’ lovers in their

eyes. Nay, nay, you shall not escape me ; remember I am thy latest lover and I would know my rivals."

"But this is a jest, my lady," faltered Ethel, overcome by confusion and struggling to rise.

But the torturer had her now and held her firmly in her grip. Bending over her and pretending to read in her eyes, she resumed :

"The first name I see there is LAUNCELOT FRANKLIN. Ha, ha, ha ! That blush tells me I have read rightly. But by the faded characters in which it is written, I can perceive that some more favoured cavalier has taken the place he once held in your favour."

"Oh lady, for pity sake, release me !" cried Ethel, half terrified as well as confused by these strange words—a feeling which was greatly enhanced by those glittering eyes that had begun to assume a fierce expression looking so closely into hers. She made yet more strenuous efforts to free herself, but was held immovable by a hand that kept her down with no gentle force.

"What letters are these that rise up so boldly and clearly denoting that they spell the name of the lover who is dearest to thy heart ?" went on Lady Carlisle mercilessly, and bending yet closer over her victim as though her eyes were basilisks to strike her dead. "Surely my cunning has failed me this time and it is the reflection of my own eyes I read in yours ! Yet if it be true—God help thee, poor moth !—for thou art fluttering round a candle that will burn thy wings—nay, destroy thee ! Shall I tell you the name I read now ?"

"No, no, no !"

"I will, and you shall tell me whether my art is true or false : it is THOMAS WENTWORTH."

As she pronounced the last words she released her hold, and, quick as lightning, Ethel sprang to her feet, and really believing that this woman possessed some occult power, would have fled from her in terror had not the Countess placed herself before the door and turned the key.

"Come, come, little moth, you must not fly away yet," she said, with an evil smile playing about her lips ; "I am your friend and would save you from that terrible devouring flame."

"Lady Carlisle, this is cruel ; I request you to unlock that door for I will not remain here another moment." Ethel spoke courageously, indignantly, although her heart was trembling with fear all the time.

"How the little moth flutters its wings and flies in the face of its best friend ; foolish little moth !" said the tormentor mockingly.

"Let me pass," cried Ethel, with desperate courage, "or I will call for help. Let me pass !"

"I have no wish to hurt you, child," answered the other, changing her tone ; "I repeat, my only desire is to serve you ; and, therefore, I say beware of this foolish passion for a man who is so infinitely above you. Your pretty face has caught his fancy ; he will make you the toy of an idle hour, grow weary—and forget you. Such stories are being acted every day. Perhaps he has even spoken to you of marriage, and you, poor child, have believed him, believe him still. But if vanity and folly have not wholly blinded you to reason, think for a moment whether this great lord, this mighty minister, second only to the King, could so far stoop from his commanding height to raise you to his lawful bed. And even—wildest of thoughts—were he so steeped in infatuation as to cast aside every other consideration what think you would follow ? Ruin and disgrace. Men such as he must mate with their equals ; those who have been hardy enough to despise this rule have had the remainder of their lives to repent their folly in. Close your ears to my warning and I tell you solemnly, prophetically, that one of two evils will follow—shame to you or ruin to him."

These words were spoken with a passionate energy both of tone and look that could not but produce a powerful impression upon her to whom they were addressed. At first her spirit had risen against the foul suspicions cast upon him whom she worshipped as all excellent ; she thought not of herself, but it sank appalled when her enemy described the evil that would fall upon him should he wed her, for her own heart took part against itself in acknowledging the probable truth of the picture. What could she say ? She was bound by a promise not to reveal to any person her engagement, and she could not trust herself to utter a word of defence or repudiation lest her tongue might unwittingly betray her. But the pallor which had succeeded to the

indignant flush upon her cheek told Lady Carlisle the effect her last thrust had produced.

She followed up the advantage with an entire change of tone and manner, which now became tender and pitiful. She took her victim's hand led her to a seat and sat down beside her.

"You think me harsh and cruel," she said, "and yet did you know all you would wonder at my mercy and forbearance. I feel it is my duty to conceal nothing from you, for I should grieve to see one so young and ingenuous betrayed either to shame or remorse. Know then that I and my Lord Wentworth were once betrothed."

Ethel started, raised her eyes for a moment to that Judas-face, then let them fall again.

Pretending not to remark the movement Lady Carlisle continued: "He was then plain Sir Thomas Wentworth and my friends, who could not look into futurity, regarded such an alliance as too unequal. Although we loved one another with all the passion of first love a cruel destiny separated us. Both contracted new ties but the hearts of both remained unchanged, true to their first affection; years passed away and we never met, for he not able to endure the scene of his former hopes retired from Court and settled down in this remote solitude. How gladly would I have followed his example; but the cruel duties of my rank compelled me to bear my aching heart among the glitter and gaiety of the Court. Two years ago, when he was first summoned to attend upon the King, we met for the first time since our separation; he was then the husband of a noble lady, I was a widow; the honour of both forbade any reference to the past; but neither could conceal how freshly it still lingered in heart and memory. A few weeks back when he was last at Court we met again."

Here her voice cunningly faltered.

"We were alone—our hearts were full and weak, and forgetful of the propriety which should have restrained our tongues for a time we renewed our old vows. Judge then my feelings when upon arriving here I discover, no matter how, that he has betrothed himself to another."

Pale as death with hands tightly clasped and eyes fixed upon the ground Ethel had listened to this story.

"Can this be true?" she murmured involuntarily.

"What motive could I have in deceiving *you*?" responded Lady Carlisle, something of the old scorn breaking out for a moment.

The truth of such an assertion seemed to Ethel incontrovertible.

"All that I have said," resumed the other, "leads but to one conclusion—that one of us is deceived. Pardon me when I say it cannot be I, for great as he is he would not dare to cast so deadly an insult upon the house of Northumberland and the widow of Carlisle without bringing down upon him a host of enemies and summary vengeance. Think not, my poor child, that I bear you any malice; I hold you wholly blameless; I pity you, for I too have known what hopeless love is; I am ready to become your truest friend if you will have it so. One word of advice: if you would not court your own destruction do not remain beneath this roof, leave it before my lord returns, else, so well I know his persuasive tongue, you are lost; you shall not want home or protection; confide yourself to me and I will give you both, even at the risk of mortally offending him and destroying all my hopes."

Ethel tried to speak but her voice failed her, and she fell back fainting.

"Carry her to her own chamber, place her upon her bed and call someone to take charge of her," said Lady Carlisle to her women, whom she summoned.

In a little time Ethel awoke to a full sense of her misery. She would give no account to her anxious attendant of her sudden swoon, but requested to be left alone.

Since she had left her bed that morning her whole world had crumbled into dust; she had fallen from the highest pinnacle of happiness to the lowest depth of despair; she found herself bereft of love and home, of that home which was endeared to her by every tie precious to the human heart, for she felt that Lady Carlisle was right and that she must no longer remain there. Indeed, how could she after such a revelation? Not that she feared for herself; no thought dishonouring to her dear lord could find an entrance to her mind. Her fear was all for him, for had not this terrible lady threatened him with a host of enemies and summary vengeance should he fail to fulfil his promise to her? That threat alone would have driven her from him.

But beyond these things her own reflections seemed to confirm all that had been said. She was truly no mate for my Lord Wentworth; her rusticity and ignorance would but disgrace him, bar his road to advancement; better that she should know this now than hereafter when it was too late, for now she could suffer alone—then he would suffer with her. She thought of the strange disturbance he had shown when first told of this lady's coming, and of the strangeness of his manner afterwards, all of which pointed to the one truth. Well, this splendid beauty, by her wit, her noble birth and courtly manners would do honour to him, would lift him upwards not drag him downwards, could help him in all his high hopes and ambitions, enter into his grand projects, understand his thoughts, be to him an equal and a real companion. And what could she place as an offering beside all this? Only love.

But was there no feeling of reproach or bitterness mingled with these reflections? None. Her blind devotion construed even his apparent falsehood into signs of nobleness. She read it thus: His heart and inclination were given to Lady Carlisle, but his dead wife had imposed upon him a request, which he regarded as a solemn obligation not to be put aside, and for this he was ready to sacrifice his dearest wishes, his highest ambitions. Ah, how noble was this! It gave a new perfection to this god of her idolatry, threw oil upon the flame that was to consume her evermore. The glory of such a love inspired her with the devotion of martyrdom. No dying wish fettered *her*, and without her consent it was impossible for him to fulfil the obligation. Thus she would save him. She wiped away the tears that had been flowing all this time and rose animated by a spirit of strange exaltation; as she caught sight of her face in the mirror she saw a flush upon her cheeks, a fire in her eyes such as she had never before beheld there.

But whither was she to go? Lady Carlisle had offered her a home and protection. She shuddered at the thought of *that*, for she shrank instinctively from this terrible woman, the baleful fire of whose eyes had withered all her hopes. Yet such weakness was a poor beginning to that utter self-sacrifice upon which she had resolved. This offer was the only means by which she could quit Woodhouse,

for where else could she go?—she who knew no more of the world beyond than did one of my lord's little children. Ah, why were there not religious houses as in the olden time, where such as she could hide away their sorrows and be forgotten? There were still such abroad; the good Queen was a Catholic—perhaps she would help her to find such a refuge. She would mention nothing of this intention to Lady Carlisle but would act upon it immediately she arrived in London. Such were the resolutions she formed.

A little time afterwards she sought out the Countess and thanking her for her "generous offer," intimated that she would accept it.

Lady Carlisle was scarcely prepared for such promptitude but she eagerly availed herself of it.

"That is good and noble, dear child," she said, pressing her hand with real warmth this time. "But you must not go away with me; you must leave no clue, no trace behind. Let me see how we can contrive?"

And she pondered for some moments.

"I have it," she cried presently. "You must leave this night when all the household have retired to rest."

"To-night!" faltered Ethel; and spite of her brave resolution her heart sank at the thought of so speedy a departure.

"To-night; I will send away two of my men and one of my women at once as though to prepare for my accommodation in advance. They shall await you at some spot we can afterwards determine upon, at a certain hour. You shall then proceed with them as far as the inn at which I stayed previous to arriving here, and there abide my coming. You must not cumber yourself with baggage as I will provide you with all you need when we arrive in London. But anything you desire to take, place in the hands of my maid Cecile. Now go and prepare, but be cautious not to excite suspicion."

As soon as Ethel had left the room the Countess sought out Mistress Elizabeth to tell her of the marvellous success of their plot.

It seemed like a dream to Ethel as she stood at her chamber-window watching the red sun sink behind the mist-covered woods that she was looking upon this scene for the

last time; it was as though she were taking leave of the world, for this home had ever been *her whole world*. And it was all so sudden, so without warning; for when that sun had risen there was no shadow of the coming trouble.

In the midst of these contemplations the door burst open and the two children rushed in to say good-night to "dear Ethel." Then her fortitude broke down. Kneeling upon the floor she clasped them both in her arms, raining upon them hot tears and passionate kisses until they cried for very sympathy and the nurse looked on wonderingly. When they were gone there arose a doubt in her mind—was she doing right in abandoning these dear innocents who had been so solemnly committed to her care by their dead mother? But they needed not her; there were others to love and guard them when she was gone and all memory of her would soon fade out of their young minds. There was more bitterness in that thought even than in all others. A few hours ago she looked upon them with a mother's eyes, as her own dear ones from whom only death could part her, and now she had looked upon them for the last time.

Oh the agony of this terrible parting! Would her strength hold out to the end?

"My ever dear lord and benefactor," she sat down and wrote, "I have left Woodhouse for ever, because reflection has told me I am not worthy of the honour you intended me and were I to remain I should not have the strength to persevere in rejection. Do not seek me, do not trouble for me. May the good God pour down upon you all blessings. I can write no more. Farewell."

She tied this letter carefully with silk and left it upon the table.

The clock had just tolled eleven—all the household had been in bed two hours ago, when there came a gentle knock at Mistress Elizabeth's chamber-door. It was answered by Sibyl, and Lady Carlisle attired in a loose wrapper entered the room. There was a look of triumph upon her face as she whispered, "She is gone."

Elizabeth was sitting fully dressed in front of a bright fire that blazed upon the hearth. Even in that ruddy light her face looked deathly pale.

"Who unfastened the doors for her?" she inquired in a whisper.

"I left everything to the management of one of my footmen, a man upon whom I can always rely. Here is a letter I found upon her table addressed to Wentworth. It contains nothing that can compromise me, but it is better he should not have it."

And she cast the farewell into the flames.

"What will he say when he hears of this?" exclaimed Elizabeth, fear coming into her white face. "His wrath will be terrible."

"It cannot fall upon you."

"I am not sure of that. You will take care to properly bestow that poor girl. I would not have any harm come to her."

"Fear not for her; I have no anger against her *now*," replied Lady Carlisle contemptuously.

Book VI.—Destiny.

CHAPTER I.

A STARTLING RENCONTRE.

UPON hearing the news of Lady Wentworth's death Launcelot had written to Ethel a few lines of tender condolence upon her bereavement, and entrusted them to a messenger who was travelling into Yorkshire. They never reached their destination, for the man lost the letter upon the road. But of this accident Launcelot remained in ignorance.

Had it not been for his acquaintance with Godfrey Hornby, who frequently won him out of his solitude, he would scarcely ever have crossed the threshold of his chambers. He was by nature a man of thought rather than of action ; yet, at the same time, possessed of a mind seething with passion and enthusiasm. Such men's destinies are shaped by circumstances : they either take a lead in the noblest and busiest paths of life or sink into dreamers and sedentary students. Launcelot was rapidly verging towards the last. He had but two pleasures : one in his books, the other in contemplating a phantom which his fancy could call up at pleasure. It was this habit which had made his love so absolute ; he had fed it with heart and brain until it had become an indissoluble part of himself. It was possible that as years went by and the fires of youth waned for lack of fuel that this love might become almost wholly purified of

passion, and content itself with the glorified creation of its own fancy.

He had no intimate save Hornby who day by day seemed to draw closer and closer to him. The soldier would frequently chide him for his absent and melancholy air, until he found that persistence in such a course would make a breach in their friendship. Then he desisted ; but not without many angry and impatient mutterings within that so fine and brave a young fellow, whose talents might carve out for him so grand a future, should waste all upon the love of a woman who, perhaps, scarcely gave a thought to him.

And yet, perchance, this very constancy, unknown to himself, was the subtle sympathy which drew him towards Launcelot. He had seen Ethel but once—on the evening of the duel between Savile and Franklin—since he abandoned her as a child ; he had caught her in his arms to save her from falling ; for a few moments her head had rested upon his shoulder. The sweetness and beauty of her face had touched him, calling up a thousand memories, tender as well as bitter, for it was so like her mother's. From that hour it had dwelt in his remembrance and was the pleasantest thing there. Sometimes there came a half regret that he had so wholly renounced this innocent being whose love might have so softened the rigour of his life ; his stubborn pride tried hard to crush these relentings, without always succeeding. But his tenderness, repressed in its true inclinations, manifested itself in another way ; he closed his heart against his daughter and opened it to her lover ; he was cynical, angry, impatient at what he termed Launcelot's infatuation, and yet the deeper he probed its intensity the more did his very soul yearn towards the youth. He would have indignantly repudiated such a thought, even to his own mind ; but so it was.

He had made fresh efforts to discover some traces of the guilty pair who had embittered his life ; but to no purpose. He had frequently met Pym since that interview in Lincoln's Inn, but although that personage was still haunted by the idea that there lingered in the *oubliettes* of his memory some information that might prove valuable, he could not at present penetrate the darkness. In some rare moment of softness Hornby would suffer his fancy to picture the dark doubt removed and Ethel and Launcelot united ; but he

would never permit his imagination to rest upon such a vision, for while there remained a shadow, even of reflected stain, upon her head his sense of honour would have shrunk from such a consummation.

An innuendo that Pym had let fall in that same interview had rankled in his mind ever since, suggesting a new train of ideas in regard to the relations between Ethel and Wentworth. Pym had sneered at "the fatherly love" of the latter, and followed it up by a remark upon Ethel's great beauty. The changes wrought by years are so gradual and imperceptible, to-day is so like yesterday and to-morrow so like to-day that though time moves on we seem stationary, until some event or word suddenly reveals to us that we have passed from youth to age and that children have become men and women. Some such revolution of ideas as we have previously noted in Wentworth upon these same relations had as suddenly occurred to Hornby. Wentworth was still a young man in the prime of life; report said he was a gallant man; he was a widower; his relations with Ethel must in the ordinary course of events be free and unrestrained. His faith in Wentworth's high honour would not admit of direct suspicion but his estimate of all virtue was cynical. He tried to crush down such uneasy feelings by the reflection that his own act had alienated her, that she was no more to him than a stranger; but the parental instinct was stronger than such sophism and would not be so silenced.

At length, unable to any longer endure this uneasiness, he resolved to pay a visit of observation to Woodhouse. He communicated his intention to Launcelot, making no mention, it need scarcely be remarked, of the object of his journey, and asked him to be his companion.

The young man very eagerly assented. He also had been contemplating such an expedition for some time; he so passionately desired to hear some tidings of Ethel, to know how Lady Wentworth's death had affected her position, to obtain, if possible, a glimpse of her person, perhaps a few words with her.

There was likewise another motive which impelled him to take this journey. The few and very brief letters he received from home continued to increase his uneasiness respecting the course of affairs there. Any hint he gave in his letters to his father of visiting Franklin Hall was met with a distinct

prohibition. Mr. Blatherwick had come up to London for a few days and paid him a visit, during which he took him to task with such domineering insolence for not attending the Tabernacle of Mr. Ishmael Wolf that a violent quarrel ensued, since when he had not received a line from his parents. He now resolved to take advantage of this expedition to ascertain with his own eyes and ears what was going on at the Hall.

It was on the day of Wentworth's arrival in London, of which they were consequently ignorant, that the two friends set forward on their journey. On the second evening they put up at a large hostelry some eighty miles from town. While they were discussing a bottle of wine, and waiting for their supper to be cooked they heard a great bustle in the inn-yard. It was still daylight, for a heavy rain had shortened their journey that day, and upon going to the window they saw a number of servants both male and female on horseback; the splendid liveries of the former only partly concealed by the cloaks they wore bespoke the arrival of a person of some consequence.

Suddenly Launcelot uttered an exclamation of astonishment, and telling his companion to "Look!" pointed to a lady whom one of the men was assisting to alight from her horse and whose hood falling back revealed the pale features of Ethel.

Half doubting the evidence of his eyes, he ran out of the room, followed by Hornby, and the next moment stood face to face with her. Ethel's amazement at such a meeting was equal to his own; with the exception of Wentworth himself there was not a person on the face of the earth she would have so wished to avoid at that moment.

"Mr. Franklin!"

"Ethel, can it be you!"

There Launcelot stopped speechless with surprise, and before he could recover himself sufficiently to utter another word the bustle around him was still further increased by the arrival of a fresh batch of servants bearing upon their shoulders a litter closed with velvet curtains from which stepped forth my Lady Carlisle. She took in the whole scene on the instant, Ethel's confused face and the eager inquiring countenance of the young stranger. Fearing it might be some friend of Wentworth's who had thus so

unfortunately encountered her she pressed forward and demanded sharply :

“What is this? Who is this?”

“My name, madam, is Launcelot Franklin,” answered the young man, wondering who this grand lady who spoke with so much authority might be.

Launcelot Franklin! why that was the name of the lover Elizabeth had spoken of, was the thought that darted through her mind, and her countenance brightened into a more gracious expression as she remarked :

“A friend of this young maiden’s, I presume?”

“Mr. Franklin was formerly a visitor at my lord’s,” interposed Ethel, quickly, fearful of a more particular explanation.

“Are you staying at this hostelry?” inquired Lady Carlisle.

“We are for the night,” replied Launcelot, turning his head towards Hornby—who kept a little in the background—to intimate he was not alone.

“Then perhaps you and your friend will do us the honour to sup with us?” said the Countess graciously.

Ethel cast an entreating glance as though imploring her to recall the invitation.

Launcelot hesitated; it would be a great joy to him to spend a short time in that dear presence, and he was most anxious to learn what had brought her so far from home, yet his diffidence scarcely knew how to accept this offer from a stranger of whose name even he was ignorant.

Hornby stepped forward and relieved him of his embarrassment.

“We thank you, Lady Carlisle, for your condescension,” he said, taking off his hat with a low bow, “and shall be delighted to accept it.”

The lady so addressed honoured the speaker with a haughty stare, then turned again to Launcelot and said :

“We shall expect you in an hour. Come, child.”

And leaning upon Ethel’s shoulder she ascended the staircase which led to one of those antique galleries by which the yards of all large inns were at that period surrounded, and conducted by mine host and hostess, bowing to the ground, entered the apartment prepared for her.

“Oh madam, what have you done!” exclaimed Ethel as they walked up the stairs.

"Given thee the pleasure of supping with thy lover," whispered the other mockingly.

"Madam, you are mistaken——"

"Tush, tush; if we had slighted him, might he not have hastened to my Lord Wentworth and told him in whose company he had met you? We must guard against that. Who is his friend?"

"I do not know, madam; I cannot remember having seen him before."

"He savours too much of the camp and the tavern to prove choice company."

"Is that the celebrated Lady Carlisle?" inquired Launcelot of Hornby, when they had passed out of hearing.

"The same," replied the other. "But what does this mean? Why is the wench here, and with her?"

The apartment in which the Countess was to sup was, as a matter of course, the best in the hostelry; it was a spacious wainscoted room, the ceiling begrimed with the smoke of years was scarcely more than six feet above the rush-covered floor; a large heavy table, two or three rush-bottomed chairs and a few stools formed the sole furniture. Had not my lady carried her own table equipage she would have had to eat off beechwood and pewter; and had not my lady travelled with her own cook she might have had to put up with coarse fare coarsely dressed, for no luxuries and few comforts were to be found in the inns of that period. With the aid, however, of such auxiliaries and half a dozen of her own attendants my lady contrived to sup.

She had ordered Ethel's chair to be placed close beside her own so that it should be impossible for Launcelot to utter one word that did not reach her ear. Throughout the meal she carefully warded off any reference to the subject she saw he was eager to broach by keeping up an unceasing fire of small talk, which chiefly consisted of abuse of everything connected with the country, the inns, the roads, the people. As soon as the supper was over, Ethel, according to instructions given her, which too fully endorsed her own inclinations not to obtain prompt obedience, rose from the table and curtsying to the two gentlemen was conducted from the room by one of my lady's footmen.

Launcelot's mortification was intense ; he had scarcely been able to address a word to her. He would have followed and implored her to give him a few words in private, but etiquette forbade him to rise from the table while the hostess kept her seat.

For a time she slyly enjoyed his discomfiture, pursuing the conversation with increased animation ; and he was just searching about in his mind for the most polite way of asking the explanation he was determined to have, when she anticipated him by ordering the servants who had been employed in clearing away the remnants of the feast to leave the room.

"Mr. Franklin," she began as soon as they were alone, and turning upon him an arch smiling look—for his handsome face and gentle manners had won her favour—"I know that from the moment you entered this room you have been dying to ask one question, and that is, by what strange accident your mistress is here and under my protection. Nay, never blush, sir ; I know your secret."

"I confess, lady, I am somewhat astonished to find——"

"Her so far from Woodhouse ? No doubt. Perhaps you will be equally astonished when I tell you that of all persons at this time you were the one I most desired to see. I was about to seek you out in London."

"Indeed, madam," answered Launcelot, truly surprised.

"I presume your friend is *wholly* in your confidence ?" she inquired.

"Wholly, madam."

"First I must tell you, then, that Mistress Ethel has left Woodhouse never to return."

"Never to return !" echoed both listeners simultaneously—Hornby being thrown off his guard by the suddenness of the announcement.

"And, secondly, that she has placed herself under my protection."

"But why is this ? What does my Lord Wentworth say to this ?" asked Launcelot in great bewilderment.

"He does not yet know of her flight."

"Her flight ?"

"I mean her departure," she added, and paused with feigned embarrassment. Then raising her head with a well-assumed air of sudden frankness, she continued : "Since

this unexpected meeting has compelled my confidence, gentlemen, I must perforce tell you all and trust to your honours not to betray me—and her.”

Launcelot's agitation increased with every word; Hornby's was not less, but it showed itself only in his eyes.

“Your ladyship may rely upon us both,” answered Franklin; “but I conjure you not to keep me another moment in suspense. What was the occasion of this—flight?”

“I was the occasion; it was by my counsel,” she answered, evading a direct reply.

“Still I cannot understand——”

“Well, perhaps, I thought it was more seemly for a maiden so young and beautiful to be under the protection of one of her own sex,” she answered in a tone of palpable evasion.

The dark suspicions which her very first words had kindled in Hornby's mind began to affect Launcelot.

“Nay, madam,” he cried impatiently, “there is more, much more than this.”

“Perhaps, then,” she went on, with a pretty show of reluctance, “there may be such relations pending between myself and my Lord Wentworth that I may prefer her to be under my care rather than his. We all have our foolish jealousies, you know.”

“Good God, madam, you do not mean to insinuate that my Lord Wentworth is such a villain——” began Launcelot.

“I insinuate nothing,” she interrupted quickly, “and least of all any opprobrium to my Lord Wentworth, whose honour is as dear to me as my own.”

“But in what other form am I to construe your words, madam?” demanded Launcelot.

“Literally as I speak them and no further,” she replied.

“I must see Ethel at once——”

“Not here,” she again interposed. “Two days hence we shall be in London; on the third I shall be happy to receive you at my poor house at Whitehall. Nay, no objections. I am your friend, and I will do my utmost to serve you in that which is nearest to your heart,” she added

with a significance he could not fail to understand. "There is my hand—not another word."

Calmed by her last words, which opened so many fair hopes to his imagination, he raised the white hand thus proffered respectfully to his lips.

Immediately afterwards, at a signal, one of her attendants entered, bearing three exquisitely-chased silver goblets, one of which was smaller than the others. The lady took the latter, and desired the larger cups to be handed to her guests. They were filled with burnt sack, a potation, she averred, of which she always took a small quantity before retiring to rest to overcome a sleeplessness to which she was subject. The quality of the beverage was so excellent that the gentlemen needed little persuasion to pledge their hostess and drain it to the last drop.

"We shall meet, then, at Whitehall, three days hence," she said, rising and addressing Launcelot.

"Nay, to-morrow morning, if it please your ladyship, I would love to speak a few words with Ethel," he answered.

"I should like it better the other way," she answered; "but it is no matter."

The inn was so filled by Lady Carlisle's retinue that our two travellers were obliged to put up with one chamber containing two beds between them, and to this they at once retired upon leaving her apartment.

"Can you read this riddle?" demanded Launcelot. "I cannot believe such dishonour of my Lord Wentworth as this lady's explanation might seem to imply; and yet how else can we read it?"

Hornby had cast himself into a chair, and with his broad-leafed hat slouched over his face and his chin resting upon his breast was now buried in deep thought.

His companion waited long and anxiously for his answer.

"If it be so," he replied presently, "my last belief in man's honour will be destroyed. We must sift this to the very bottom. But my Lady Carlisle is not above suspicion; her whole life has been passed in intrigues; she is the most subtle plotting woman of the age; she has all but confessed her design of becoming the third Lady Wentworth. The whole truth can be gleaned only from the girl's own lips."

"And that I will have spite of every opposition before they leave this inn to-morrow morning," said Launcelot determinedly.

But man proposes, etc. It was long past noon ere they awoke next morning, to find that Lady Carlisle had departed four hours previously.

"That sack was drugged," said Hornby. "I can feel it in my head still."

"Then there is foul play, depend on it," cried Launcelot excitedly,

Without waiting for any refreshment they at once started upon the road. There was no difficulty in tracing so large a cavalcade, and towards evening weary and exhausted with long and heavy riding upon coming up to an hostelry about thirty miles from London, they saw gathered about the door the welcome livery of Carlisle.

"Where is your lady or the young maiden who bears her company? I must see either at once," demanded Launcelot of one of the men.

"They are not with us, master," replied the fellow with a sly grin; "they have taken another road, and sleep at my Lord Middlemas's to-night."

At first he would not credit this information, but he soon proved it to be correct. Filled with the most anxious fears he would have at once started across country to retrack the fugitives had not his companion stayed him.

"Quite useless," said Hornby; "she is determined to elude us. You must wait patiently for the proposed visit to her ladyship's house."

CHAPTER II.

HORNBY'S PLEDGE.

LADY CARLISLE's project was to bring about a marriage between Ethel and Launcelot, and thereby to place an insuperable barrier between Ethel and Wentworth. It was necessary to prepare the young girl's mind for such a proposal before she and her lover met in private ; hence her avoidance of him. On the day after the meeting at the inn she had requested Ethel, who had hitherto performed the journey upon horseback, to share her litter and at once broached the subject. She was scarcely prepared for the vehement opposition it received.

"Ah foolish moth !" she said irritably, "you would still flutter around the flame ; my Lord Wentworth still holds your heart."

"You wrong me, Lady Carlisle," she answered proudly.

So finished a diplomatist found little difficulty in probing so ingenuous a mind and extracting its inmost secrets, and before they separated that night she had heard and read the whole story of her and Launcelot, read more than even Ethel herself had ever suspected. She had discovered in that pride which forbade her to accept his advances while a mystery was upon her birth a new and unsuspected phase of character, which she perceived would be difficult to deal with. To all her urgings Ethel had but one answer, that she should never marry, that her sole desire was to enter some religious house abroad and there pass the remainder of her existence.

"If you, madam, can in any way advance my wishes I shall be eternally grateful," she added.

Lady Carlisle replied that her connections in France could easily find such a refuge, but that she would better consult her happiness by becoming the wife of one who evidently loved her very fondly.

"The convent must do if the other fail," was my lady's thought; "but the other way would be more certain, and it would besides so mortify my Lord Wentworth."

She resolved not to relinquish this point without a struggle, and hoped to find in the lover an ally who would unscrupulously aid her in anything she might propose.

When Launcelot presented himself on the appointed day at the lady's house, he was immediately admitted and conducted to that chamber in which the last interview between her and Wentworth had taken place. In a few moments the Countess joined him.

His first inquiry was for Ethel.

"I regret to say she refuses to see you," was the answer.

"Pardon me when I say, Lady Carlisle, that I must see her," answered Launcelot very positively, for he suspected this refusal was only a ruse on the part of his hostess.

"I understand," she answered, with a curl of her lip. "You think it is I who have dictated this answer. Very well, then, you *shall* hear it from her own lips."

She left the room and was absent some minutes, which Launcelot passed in the most agitated suspense.

When she returned she brought Ethel, looking pale and distressed, with her. With an exclamation of joy he sprang forward and seized both her hands.

"Why have you insisted upon seeing me, Mr. Franklin?" she said; "such a meeting can only distress us both."

"Give me but five minutes alone with you!" he entreated. "I have questions that I must put to you."

"I cannot; do not ask me."

"Ethel, you are cruel!" he said, turning aside to conceal his mortification.

"Do not say that!" she answered, her eyes filling with tears. "I should indeed be so did I encourage vain hopes. My future life is resolved upon and no persuasions shall turn me from my purpose. I shall go abroad to some foreign country, enter some religious community——"

"For God's love dismiss such a thought as that!" he cried excitedly. "I would rather now this instant relinquish you for ever, never look upon your face again than know you had consigned yourself to a living death in one of those tombs of superstition. But why have you left Woodhouse? is it of your own free will?"

"It is," she answered; "but you must not ask me any further questions—I cannot reply to them."

"It is no slight cause that would drive you from a roof that has sheltered you from childhood. You have received some gross insult from Lord Wentworth," the young man went on, losing all control over himself, "and his life shall answer for it!"

"Who has dared to breathe such a vile falsehood?" cried Ethel, her glance instinctively resting upon Lady Carlisle. "My Lord Wentworth insult me! He, my noble generous protector! He who has stooped——"

She paused suddenly; but her flashing eyes, her burning cheeks and quivering lips struck both with amazement.

"I have never hinted at such a thing," said Lady Carlisle, "as Mr. Franklin can testify. Why do you not speak, sir?"

"You have certainly not; yet what was I to understand?"

"You had not the slightest cause to put such a construction upon my words," she interposed haughtily. "I gave you no explanation concerning this lady's flight. I left that for her to make, if she so pleased."

"I have no explanation to give," replied Ethel passionately. "I have more than once entreated Mr. Franklin not to persecute me with his attentions: I now command him."

And she was turning to leave the room when Launcelot's voice arrested her.

"One word more, Ethel," he said gently, "it may be the last we shall ever exchange. I did not come here to persecute you with my attentions or even to speak of love, or to make any reference to the past, but only to inquire if there was any way in which I could serve you. I meet you at an inn, a hundred miles away from your home under a strange escort; your behaviour is agitated and mysterious, this lady refuses all explanation and her words fill me with

vague apprehensions ; in the morning I find that I and my friend have been *drugged*. Yes, there is no disguising the fact, drugged to prevent our meeting, while the Countess, taking another route, has sent forward a portion of her retinue purposely to mislead us. Had I been the merest acquaintance, such conduct must have alarmed me, and justified me in seeking from your own lips an assurance that you were not being coerced."

"Forgive my harshness. Indeed, I did not mean it," answered Ethel, with deep feeling ; "and let me assure you that I have acted, and am acting of my own free and unbiassed will in all things. Do not ask any further explanation for I cannot give it. God bless you, Launcelot, and send you every happiness that earth can give. Farewell."

And with one earnest, tearful, parting glance she hurried from the room.

For several seconds Launcelot remained with his eyes fixed upon the door through which she had disappeared, dejected, amazed, bewildered, vainly endeavouring to find in his brain some clue to her extraordinary conduct.

"Never despair, Mr. Franklin," said Lady Carlisle, approaching him, "all is not lost ; you have a friend in me who will assist you to the utmost. I will find means to give you an interview alone with her where no one can interrupt you ; if you do not then win her consent the fault rests with you. She loves you, of that I am assured ; young maidens are capricious, they do not know their own minds and a little force is sometimes necessary to bring that knowledge home to them. If you have the requisite courage and resolution, I pledge you my word that Ethel will be your wife in less than a week from now."

The significance of this speech was entirely lost upon Launcelot's wandering mind.

"I thank you, madam," he answered ; "but to possess her would give me no happiness unless it was by her own free-will. But what am I to understand of her flight from Woodhouse ?"

"I have solemnly promised her to be silent upon that subject and I must keep my word. But tell me where a letter will reach you and you shall soon hear from me."

Launcelot gave her his address and directly afterwards

took his departure, in a frame of mind far more troubled and despondent than that in which he had entered the house.

Hornby had accompanied him as far as the Holbein Gate, and there he found him waiting his return. Had he not been so immersed in his own anxieties he might have wondered at the strange interest the soldier manifested.

"Well, what news?" he asked eagerly.

Launcelot related all that had passed, to which the other listened silently attentive, until he came to her determination to enter a religious house; then he burst forth, with an oath:

"That must not—shall not be, at any cost!"

Launcelot could not but be struck by this sudden energy, but imputed it entirely to the deep interest that Hornby felt in his fortunes.

When he had finished his story they walked on in silence for some time. Hornby was revolving in his mind a momentous question, whether, without revealing his real name, he should at once claim Ethel as his daughter. She had of her own free-will renounced Wentworth's protection, and therefore, according to his idea, broken the bond that he had made; she, a young and beautiful girl totally unversed in the ways of the world was in the hands of a woman of doubtful reputation, with no relation or natural guardian to whom she could turn for counsel or assistance. Truly, the proper course for him to pursue would have been to seek out Lord Wentworth and demand an explanation of the cause of Ethel's extraordinary conduct; but, being ignorant of his presence in London, he calculated that this would occupy some eight or ten days—a delay very dangerous under the circumstances. And perhaps he was glad to avail himself of an opportunity of regaining those rights he had too hastily abandoned to a stranger.

"Launcelot," he said, stopping abruptly as they arrived at the archway leading to the Temple, "I hold the means of overcoming all these scruples and of making her your wife."

"How?" ejaculated Franklin, in great amazement.

"No matter, that would take too long to explain just now. If all obstacles to your union were removed would you marry her?"

"This very hour, if it were possible, and she *willing*; not otherwise."

"With the mystery of her birth still unexplained," continued Hornby, not regarding the reservation.

"That consideration has never for a moment weighed with me."

"But your parents?"

"I have arrived at such years when a man is the best judge of what befits his own happiness."

Again Hornby paused.

Then grasping the young man's hand, he said in the tone of one fully resolved:

"You shall have her. Not another word. We shall meet again soon."

And before Launcelot could utter a syllable he was gone.

In that walk between Whitehall and the Temple he had solved some mighty problems. If he claimed his daughter how was he, a homeless man, without a female friend or relation in the world, to bestow her? There was one solution of the difficulty—marry her to Launcelot Franklin. And what better could be found? What guardian so excellent as a husband? And where could he find a man to whom he would so readily confide his child's happiness as to him? Even had he doubted her inclination to his choice he was not the man to admit such niceties, being of the opinion that he was a better judge of the matter than she.

Having arranged his plans so far another and very cogent difficulty presented itself. How could he substantiate his claim of paternity? What proof could he adduce to Ethel, who it could scarcely be expected would place herself at the disposal of a stranger upon his bare assertion? Then he bethought him of Pym as a witness whose influential position would be a sufficient guarantee. And to Lincoln's Inn he at once proceeded.

He was so fortunate as to find him at home. His visit excited no surprise as it was a frequent occurrence; but Pym could detect in his countenance that something more than common had brought him thither on the present occasion.

Without any preface Hornby at once related the whole story, from the time of the meeting at the inn to the result of Launcelot's visit to Lady Carlisle's house. It may be

imagined with what eager attention Pym listened to this narrative. He understood in a moment the part Lady Carlisle was playing, and her motives in all she had done. This young girl was her rival and evidently a formidable one; or she would scarcely have taken so peremptory a course; and to sweep her from her path she would move heaven and earth to bring about a marriage with young Franklin. What a glorious revenge it would be to thwart this design! Such were the thoughts that passed rapidly through his mind while listening. He would fain have persuaded Hornby to delay his disclosure for a time; he represented to him that by his own act and deed he had forfeited all control over his child, unless Wentworth chose to voluntarily give back the rights he had assigned to him.

"You said quite differently a few weeks ago, when you urged me to break all bonds with him; then I had no excuse for doing so, now I have every," answered Hornby, impatiently.

"Then I spoke rashly from my hatred of Wentworth, as men do frequently when they are sure their counsel will not be adopted; now I speak as a lawyer and your friend," replied Pym.

"I have been too many years a man of the sword to take much heed of the law," answered Hornby, roughly. "Will you serve me in this or will you not? I mean, will you simply say what you know to be truth, I want nothing further; if not, I must do the best I can without your testimony."

"When do you intend to do this?"

"Before I close my eyes this night."

"So soon!"

"I never give any breathing time between my resolves and my acts."

"Very well; I will meet you to-night at seven at Holbein's Gate, that will be about my lady's supper hour."

"I will be there."

And not at all pleased with Pym's reluctant manner, he was departing without another word when the other stayed him.

"I had almost forgotten," he said; "but I expect I shall shortly have news for you. Do you remember Dart-

ford? A wild young gallant that you and I have often met in the old days."

"I have some memory of the name. What of it?"

"He and Craston were fast friends, and I bethought me the other day that it was from him I had heard that something concerning Craston which I cannot call back to my mind. I wrote to him last week and in the midst of a number of questions of quite another bearing inquired in a casual manner what had become of his old friend."

"Ha! And do you think he can give you any information?"

"I am sure he can, if he will."

"A thousand thanks, old friend. If I could but solve that doubt—ah, I tremble at the thought."

"And if it be solved who knows but you may wish yourself back again in your ignorance?"

"That is hardly possible. But remember, to-night at seven."

"I shall be there."

And Hornby took his departure.

Pym leant back in his armchair and gave himself up to meditation. After some time he drew a sheet of writing-paper towards him and wrote as follows:

"TO MY LORD WENTWORTH,—

"Is it known to you that the young maiden called Ethel has been lured from Woodhouse by Lady Carlisle, who hopes thereby to remove *a rival* and *secure you to herself*? If not you will find her at that lady's house, if you seek her there *before seven to-night*. Do not be put off by falsehood or excuse; *be imperative* and *resolute* and you will discover the truth of this information."

He summoned a servant, and having carefully sealed this missive placed it in his hands with instructions to take it to Lord Wentworth's quarters at Whitehall and deliver it to one of his attendants, with strict injunctions to let his lord have it without an instant's loss of time.

"But no word, no hint of whence you came," he added, "not though they should put thee on the rack."

"That's checkmate for my Lady Carlisle," he cogitated; "this trick will lose her Wentworth; his arrogant soul will

never forgive such an attempt to cross his mighty will. As to Hornby—well, we cannot be scrupulous over the disappointment of others where our own interests and passions are concerned.”

A knock at the door interrupted these meditations. It was a messenger bearing a letter.

“By heavens! it’s from Dartford,” he muttered as he caught sight of the superscription.

He glanced his eye rapidly over the contents until he came to a certain paragraph, at which his face assumed an expression of eager interest. He had not read two lines before he uttered an ejaculation of astonishment; when he had read to the end he let the paper fall upon his knee, seemingly overwhelmed by the unexpected news.

“This is marvellously strange,” he muttered. “And that I should remark scarcely an hour ago that he might wish he had never solved the mystery. My words were prophetic.”

CHAPTER III.

A RESCUE AND A REVELATION.

It may seem strange that Lady Carlisle, knowing Wentworth to be at Court, should have brought Ethel to Whitehall ; but the fact was that as she desired to keep her immediately under her own eye she could not otherwise bestow her, at least not until she had arranged some plan for the future. Again, while Ethel herself elected to remain undiscovered she was as safe there from detection as she would have been a hundred miles away. My lady had also impressed upon Mistress Elizabeth to hold back as long as possible the tidings of her flight, and she calculated it would be at least a week before Wentworth would hear of it. Before that time she determined that her fate should be in some way decided, either that she should be Franklin's wife or on her way to France to enter a convent.

And did the idea never suggest itself to her how probable it was that Wentworth's suspicions would fall upon her as being concerned in Ethel's disappearance ? That was a contingency she had by no means overlooked as being the weakest point of her stratagem. The only persons who could betray her were her own people, and upon their fidelity, strengthened by large bribes, she placed implicit confidence ; not one of the household at Woodhouse had been entrusted with the secret. In the consternation which ran through the house when Ethel's disappearance was discovered none took a more prominent part than she ; she delayed her own

departure a whole day, and sent out her servants in all directions to seek the lost one. And so cunningly had she laid her plans that not one of those who remained with her for a moment suspected that they were acting a part in a comedy of their lady's constructing. That some three or four of her numerous retinue should be sent forward in advance to prepare for her accommodation upon the road was a circumstance of no significance. Still she had to deceive a mind of extraordinary penetration and sagacity, to whom all these clever devices might be transparent as glass. There was the risk she had to take. She played to win all, or lose all.

Already, however, her difficulties had begun ; in the first place she had discovered that her estimate of Ethel's character had been erroneous ; that she was not the weak lymphatic creature she had at first believed her to be ; that beneath her gentleness and artlessness there burned a high proud spirit not easily to be bent, and a great power of endurance. Again, in the pure and lofty nature of Franklin's love, seeking nothing selfishly, mindful only of the happiness of her he loved, she received another check. Such love, at least in man, accustomed as she was to measure man by the heartless dissolute courtiers that surrounded her, was a phenomenon she had not looked for. She could perceive that the suggestions she had thrown out were not even understood by him, and she was too cunning not to perceive that a repetition of such would be the height of indiscretion.

As soon as Launcelot had departed she repaired to Ethel's chamber. She hated the young girl with all a woman's jealousy, hated her for her beauty, and, above all as being her rival in the affections of the man to win whom she was ready to commit any wickedness ; and impatient at her resistance she took little pains to conceal her sentiments. But Ethel encountered her arrogance, her sarcasm, her bitterness, with a calm courage that neither passion nor contumely could break down, and she had to leave her mortified and defeated but more vengeful than ever.

Ethel had already begun to repent that she had ever placed herself in the hands of this woman, as well as to feel misgivings concerning the propriety of her sudden flight from Woodhouse. Had she acted rightly in forsaking the home that had sheltered her from infancy, that noble friend

who had so loved, so honoured her, in leaving him in cruel doubt of her fate, and all for a few words from a woman whom she had never met before and who confessed herself to be a rival? Was not such conduct ungrateful, wicked? Might not Lady Carlisle's story be false, or partly so? Was it consonant with that high and spotless honour which she had so worshipped in him? And was her faith in that honour to be broken down by the assertions of the first stranger who chose to impugn it? Such were the reflections that, now too late, punished her rashness. Had not Lady Carlisle taken her in the midst of her insulted pride, her wounded sensitiveness—for these, after all, were the strongest incentives of her flight—had she allowed that first perturbation of mind which forbade all reasoning to subside she would scarcely have succeeded so easily.

The result of these cogitations was that she resolved to write to Wentworth a full explanation of her conduct and of her future plans to enter some religious community abroad. To return to Woodhouse after her flight, or to accept any further bounty at his hands after what had passed between them her pride felt to be impossible. And beyond this Lady Carlisle's representations had so fully awakened her to the sacrifices their union would entail upon Wentworth, that she blushed at herself for having ever entertained the idea. "I, who rejected Launcelot Franklin as not being his equal to dare to lift my thoughts to him!" she mused.

But an accident, which none of the actors in this drama could have possibly foreseen was about to scatter all their calculations to the winds.

About six o'clock that evening, while Lady Carlisle was reposing upon a couch in her favourite boudoir perusing the last poetic oblation to her vanity, she was startled by the announcement that my Lord Wentworth was below and desired to see her instantly. She could see her colour come and go as she glanced at herself in the mirror. Had he heard of Ethel's flight, and were his suspicions aroused, or was it a visit meant to herself alone?

She heard his rapid step ascending the stairs and ran to open the door herself, but ere she reached it it flew back and he stood before her.

"Ah, my dear lord, this is indeed an unexpected——"

The remainder of the sentence died upon her lips, and she

was awed to silence by the expression of his pale stern face, in which she read her own discovery and discomfiture.

"Where is Ethel?" he demanded harshly.

"Ethel! What do you mean—whom do you mean?" she faltered, vainly endeavouring to rally her usual effrontery and presence of mind beneath those fierce eyes that were reading her very soul.

"No evasions, no falsehoods; she is here; there is confession in your guilty looks."

"My lord, you forget to whom you are speaking, and you speak in riddles to which I have no key," she answered, assuming a tone of offended dignity. "Explain yourself as becomes a gentleman, and I may answer your questions."

"I have no words to bandy with you," he replied, in yet harsher accents; "call Ethel into this room instantly, or I will summon half a dozen of the King's guards that wait below and search your house from floor to ceiling."

"You would not dare," she cried, with flashing eyes; "even your power would not allow of putting such a degradation upon a lady of my rank."

"We shall see," he answered; and turning to a man, whom she had not observed before standing in the doorway, he said, "Bring up the sergeant and his men."

The servant bowed and vanished.

"Oh this is monstrous!" she cried, giving way to her passion. "I will at once to the King and will not leave him until he has promised me justice for this insult."

"You will not leave this house or this room until you have rendered up her you have stolen away."

"Better and better; you make me a prisoner."

Here the regular tramp of the soldiers ascending the stairs, followed by a crowd of wondering domestics, interrupted her speech, and the next moment six men of the royal guard led by a sergeant filed into the corridor and halted for orders.

Half beside herself at this ruin of all her subtle plans she was about to call upon her domestics to forcibly expel the intruders, but the thought of the uselessness of such resistance and the greater humiliation it must inevitably bring down upon her, changed this resolution to the more prudent one of obedience to the inevitable.

"Dismiss those men, my lord," she said, "and what you desire shall be granted."

"Go," he said, turning to the sergeant, "but remain below within call."

"And you, curs," she cried, addressing the domestics with withering disdain, "who would suffer your mistress's house to be invaded thus and offer no resistance, begone to your offices. No words; I'll have the first man or woman flogged who dares to utter a syllable."

The threat was effective, and in another moment she and Wentworth were again alone.

"I will fetch you—minion," she said, leaving the room with a glance full of fury.

Ethel, prostrated by fatigue and by the violent emotions of the last few days, had not left her chamber since her brief interview with Launcelot. That interview had revealed to her something of Lady Carlisle's plans, and had determined her to write the next morning to the Queen, concealing her name and connection with Lord Wentworth and merely representing herself as a young maiden desirous, through a great affliction, of entering a convent. It was a strange idea, and one which could scarcely have been conceived by a person more versed in worldly knowledge; but she had been taught to regard her sovereign as the fountain of all goodness and bounty, and to whom else could she turn in her helpless friendlessness? In the midst of such meditations she heard loud talking below, then the tramp of soldiers. In great alarm she opened her door and listened, and there fell upon her ear a voice that made her heart leap. The next moment she saw Lady Carlisle's white face ascending the stairs.

"You are wanted below," said the Countess, in a voice almost inarticulate with passion. "Come!"

But Ethel could not stir until the Countess gripped her viciously by the wrist and almost dragged her down the stairs.

What a relief it was to Wentworth when he caught sight of Ethel's pale face! What a load of affliction was on the instant uplifted from his heart! how he yearned to clasp her to his bosom and hold her there, his recovered treasure! but he restrained these feelings, and only grasped her hand and let something of his soul look out of his eyes.

He spoke no word but "Come, Ethel!" and still holding her hand was about to descend the stairs when Lady Carlisle confronted him.

"I must speak a few words with you before you go, my lord," she said.

"It is useless," he answered. "You and I, Lady Carlisle, have done with each other evermore. Henceforth we are strangers."

"The more need of a few parting words, then. You shall not leave without them, unless you choose to crown your dastardly conduct by offering me personal violence, for I will bar your passage with all my strength."

Her colourless face, with its two burning orbs, convulsed by suppressed passion, her white lips drawn tightly over her teeth, between which her words hissed, were horrible to look upon, and Edith clung close and trembling to Wentworth's arm.

He gazed upon the fury with a look of cold disdain, saying, "Very well, since you insist upon it, be it so."

They returned to the room, and she closed the door and stood with her back against it turning her baleful visage full upon them.

"My Lord Wentworth," she began, trying to steady her voice to a calm utterance but failing miserably, "you have put such an outrage upon me this night as would be degrading to the vilest of my sex; do you imagine that I shall sit tamely under it?"

"Oh my lord," cried Ethel, remembering her former threats, "do not, I implore, let any thought of me stir up strife between this lady and you. I left Woodhouse of my own free-will; she has treated me most kindly; let me not stand between you and her. She has a higher, worthier claim upon you than I——"

"Silence, Ethel," he interrupted sternly.

"Ay, silence, fool," broke in the Countess passionately; "do you think I want your puling advocacy? Were he now to grovel at my feet and beg for pardon until daylight tomorrow he would not abate one jot of the hatred he has roused. He has outraged every womanly feeling; he has degraded my pride, held me up to the derision of my domestics, trampled upon my love and humiliated me in the presence of a rival."

"You are no rival of this lady's," he answered with the same immovable coldness; "she is my affianced wife. I have professed no love to you."

"'Tis false," she cried, maddened by this open acknowledgment of his sentiments for Ethel, "as I could prove had I courage to expose my own weakness. But you are right. I should blush to call myself the rival of such as she. A most noble alliance for the King's minister, this scullion, this——"

"I will hear no more of this abuse; let me pass," said Wentworth, beginning to lose his self-control.

"Had you not enemies enough," she went on not heeding his words, "but you must add me to the number? You scorn and defy me now, but you shall change your note ere long for I will never rest until I have accomplished your destruction. Now go, and remember my parting words."

"Your threats inspire me only with contempt," he answered disdainfully. "I leave you with but one other feeling—thankfulness, since your arts might at one time have infatuated me even to make you my wife."

And supporting Ethel's half-fainting form he passed down the stairs and out of the house.

Scarcely had he quitted the room when the Countess overcome by the terrible emotions she had passed through fell swooning upon the floor.

* * * * *

Seven o'clock found Hornby impatiently pacing up and down in front of the Holbein Gate. A few minutes after the hour had struck Pym arrived.

"You are late," he said.

"A little," answered the other; "I have strange news to tell you that may affect your visit."

"Well, tell it me as we go along. Come."

"No; turn back with me a few steps where we may be more private, within the palace precincts the walls have ears. I have had a letter from Dartford."

"Well?"

"And it contains news of Craston."

"Great heavens!"

"Did I not tell you a few hours since that the mystery solved you might live to wish it unknown again? Prepare yourself for a great shock."

"I am prepared for anything," replied Hornby; but his manifest agitation belied his words.

"It would be useless for me to show you the letter as there is no light to read it by ; but I have got the paragraph that relates to you by heart, it runs thus :

" ' You ask me what has become of Craston. I do not know that I have a right to answer that question as I was bound over to secrecy, but as so many years have elapsed since then I cannot see that any harm can come of it. You know that with the disappearance of a certain lady he went abroad. He was summoned back to England by the news that an uncle on the mother's side had just died leaving him an estate, on condition that he should assume the testator's name ; nothing could have better fallen in with his desires. He is now a most rigid Puritan ; his estate is in Yorkshire, within a few miles of Wentworth-Woodhouse, and his name is SIR RICHARD FRANKLIN.' "

Hornby staggered as though he had been struck a heavy blow and leaned against a wall for support. " Good God, can this be true ! " he muttered.

" You will not go to Carlisle's to-night ? "

" Not to-night," he answered faintly ; " lend me your arm, I feel giddy."

CHAPTER IV

“THINE FOR EVER.”

“But how did you discover I was at Lady Carlisle’s? When did you hear I had left Woodhouse?”

“Only two or three hours ago—I received a long letter from Mr. Greenwood, giving me a minute account, as far as he himself knew, of your strange disappearance; the tone of his letter directed my suspicions, as he evidently intended it should, to the guilty party, and I had determined to pay her a visit as my first step when this anonymous letter was brought to me,” and he showed her Pym’s note.

This dialogue took place in Wentworth’s private apartments at Whitehall, whither, having no other lodgment prepared, he had been obliged to conduct Ethel.

“But by what strange power did that woman induce you to fly your home and place yourself in her hands? Had you no thought of the sorrow and misery you were inflicting upon me, left in ignorance of your fate? Oh Ethel, that was unlike you!”

“I thought of it when it was too late,” she answered sadly.

“But by what means did the Countess gain a knowledge of our relations? Surely you did not——”

“Not one word, as I hope to be saved, has ever passed my lips.”

“It is strange. It might have been only a clever surmise of her shrewd brain, or some one might have played the

spy upon us. I do not hold my sister clear of this business."

No more did Ethel ; but she made no reply.

"Still you have not told me," he went on, "how she worked upon you to go away with her."

"She told me you had loved each other from early youth—that you were even now affianced to her. Oh ! is it true, my lord ?"

"Can you ask that question, Ethel ?" he said, in a voice of deep reproach, "after what has passed between us ?"

"Oh my dear lord," she cried, bedewing his hand with her tears, "you know not how shamed I am in my own eyes and how unworthy I feel of your great love. Send me away from you ! Never let me look upon your face again ! I deserve all that and more ; for I cannot even dare to ask your forgiveness."

"Nay, poor child, I cannot blame thee," he answered, gently stroking her head, which as she sat upon a low stool at his feet was bowed over his knee, "this woman has the cunning of the serpent, the treachery and cruelty of the tigress. How could thy poor little rustic brain contend with this subtle dweller in Courts so skilled in plot and intrigue ?"

"Your goodness finds excuses for me that my own heart will not justify. Your honour should have been to me, above all persons, beyond the taint of suspicion."

"Come, come, Ethel, we will have no more self-reproaches. Why, I should not have believed you half loved me if such a tale as that had not roused thy jealousy. I want no saint, dearest—no marble perfection."

"But that was not all," she went on, half sobbing, "she spoke words that had been in my own thoughts many and many an hour. She showed me how very far I was beneath you ; she told me that such a marriage would degrade you, lose you your great position, and that should you break with her you would bring down a terrible vengeance upon your head. Tell me, my dear lord, is this true ? Do not deceive me out of any false compassion, for what am I when weighed against you ? My poor little petty troubles against afflictions to you ? My place in the world is nothing ; but you are a great minister whose counsels guide kings. England itself is involved in your destiny. Better far I should now fall

dead at your feet than peril such interests for my poor happiness. Rather let me now this instant say farewell to you for ever if my presence will bring the lightest shadow upon your great life. Absent or present my love will always be the same, your image will ever be in my heart and I shall be ever happy knowing I have saved you from yourself; but if you take me for your wife and these dark troubles come upon you, if I see you shamed and dragged down from your high state through me I shall know a misery far far more bitter than parting."

She was on her knees before him with upturned face, and clasping both his hands, the words rushing tumultuously from her lips, but with many breaks and stops.

"If thou wast the most cunning of thy sex," he said, taking her tearful face between his hands and gazing upon it with moistened eyes, "and sought a way to draw my heart yet closer to thee thou couldst have found no better one than this. Hush! no word. As to Lady Carlisle's threats, I have only contempt for them, they were the bombast of a jealous woman, nothing more; her very fury proved her impotence. 'You know the old adage, 'threatened men live long;' the ministers of kings are so used to the clamours of hatred that in a little time they cease to heed them. My Lady Carlisle is no favourite at Court, she has mingled too much with the disaffected party, and her known passion for plot and intrigue has cast too much suspicion about her for his Majesty to regard her with any favourable eye. And beyond that, while I am true to my King and country I stand above the reach of private malice."

He spoke confidently; and yet the Countess's bitter words had left a sting behind them which he could not pluck out.

"As for thy old scruples," he resumed, "have I not told thee thou art of gentle birth; what more is the king himself? and it is a distinction that many of our nobles cannot claim in these days. If there be anything in mere title you can take precedence of me; your father was a Knight, mine a plain Mister, and my knighthood was bought, as it was daily bought by grocers and haberdashers under our late King. So let me hear no more of them. And now tell me what plan you had formed for the future?" he resumed with a change of tone.

"I had intended to write to the Queen, begging her to place me in a convent," she replied.

He could not help smiling at her simplicity, but a shade of gravity crossed his face as he said: "Wouldst thou then have changed thy religion, Ethel?"

She blushed; in her agitation she had probably never regarded the matter in that light.

"What could I do?" she faltered.

"Poor little dove," he said, gazing lovingly upon her, "thou wast indeed going to cast thyself among the hawks. You shall remain in London for the present," he went on, changing the conversation. "To-night you shall sleep here, and I will lodge elsewhere; to-morrow I will find you more suitable accommodation; but when I return in the morning I shall not find the cage empty and my pretty bird flown, shall I?" he asked smiling.

"Never again," she answered, nestling close to his heart; "be it for weal or woe I am now thine for ever."

The next day he found suitable accommodation for her in the house of a good old dame whose husband held some domestic office at Whitehall, and under whose care he arranged she should remain for the present. Rumours of the scene which had been acted on the previous night had got abroad, but from their indefiniteness it seemed Lady Carlisle had kept her own counsel and schooled her servants to do likewise. Towards evening one of his footmen informed him that the Countess accompanied by her entire suite of domestics had left that afternoon for one of her estates in Surrey.

"She has chosen wisely," he thought, "and has determined to be silent on an adventure which could only hold her up to obloquy and derision."

He was annoyed, however, to find that the visit of a young and beautiful female to his quarters had excited much gossip, which had reached even royal ears and brought forth royal questions.

It was a young maiden who had been under his protection from childhood, who had come up to London on certain affairs of her own. This was the only explanation he vouchsafed, even to the King. The gossips overawed by his haughty manners dared say no more—in his presence; but they talked among themselves.

That night he had an unexpected visitor—Hornby, who had been to Lady Carlisle's lodgings, and finding her gone and the house deserted had at once sought out Wentworth, whose presence at Court he had learned only an hour or two before. In stern and abrupt terms he demanded an account of Ethel, why she had left Woodhouse and if he knew whither the Countess had conveyed her.

"You have no more right to demand an answer to these questions, having voluntarily surrendered all parental rights, than the veriest stranger," answered Wentworth. "Yet I rejoice too much to find that all natural feelings are not wholly dead in your heart to refuse you an explanation."

As briefly as possible he related all that concerned Ethel and himself, from the wish imposed upon him by his dying wife unto the events of the previous night. Hornby listened with the most profound attention and he could not refrain from expressing his satisfaction at the manner in which Lady Carlisle's discomfiture had been accomplished.

When the narrative was ended there was a long pause, which Hornby was the first to break.

"Wentworth," he said bluntly, "you have acted with a nobleness I did not give you credit for, yet had you told me this two days ago I would have answered you should not have her while I wear a sword and have life to use it. I had promised her to another, but a mysterious fatality has put an end to all that so I care not to oppose you. Listen, and I will relate to you one of the strangest stories you ever yet heard."

And he told him that amazing discovery which Pym's letter had revealed to him.

"And my heart so yet yearned to that boy," he said bitterly, "as it had never before yearned to any living man, and he the son of that villain whose death I have sworn, of him who has wrecked my whole life. Good God, what a bitter irony of fate was this!"

"But what of *her*?" asked Wentworth, who had listened with as much interest as astonishment.

"I know no more than I have told you."

"And what do you intend to do?"

"Nothing. Were I to confront that man I should kill him. I spare him for the boy's sake. I would not have the only being on earth I can call friend curse me as a

murderer, although it is more than probable he and I will never meet again. If you choose for the sake of Ethel's honour to seek into this wretched mystery, do so."

"Would you not like to see Ethel—make yourself known to her?"

There was an inward struggle before the answer came. "No, she could have little pleasure in meeting a father who has disowned her all these years; she is nothing to me—she is yours, child and wife."

"Will you permit me to tell her something of her parentage, leaving to my discretion what should be suppressed?"

Hornby considered for a moment; then replied, with assumed indifference, "Do as you please; why do you consult me?"

"Because I am pledged on my honour to do so. Is there any way in which I can serve you? If so, command my interest to the utmost."

"None!" he answered with asperity. "I want no patronage from you or any man. While Catholics and Protestants delight in cutting each other's throats there will be always food and drink for men of the sword, and I want no more. To-morrow I start for Germany to join the brave Swedish king. I have fought for him before to-day."

"Ever wilful and headstrong," said Wentworth sadly. "But God speed you wherever you go, for her sake."

"I cannot say the like to you," replied Hornby bluntly, "because it would not come from my heart, and because you may one day meet me in the ranks of your enemies. My valediction shall be a warning. Beware how you and your tyrant master drive your victims to extremity; they may turn and crush you both!"

And with this ominous farewell he departed.

Hornby's story had indeed filled Wentworth with astonishment. How strange that Ethel should have been reared within a few miles of the man who had had such a fatal influence upon her destiny, who *might*—though Heaven forbid it should be so!—even be her father. Was Sir Richard cognisant of this fact, and was this the cause of Launcelot's banishment? Most strange that the son of this man should become enamoured of Ethel! Was then Lady Franklin the guilty Lady Rhodes? It was necessary, for

obvious reasons, that these questions should at once be solved, and for that purpose he obtained a few days' leave of absence to journey into Yorkshire. Not breathing a word of his intentions or of anything he had heard, but ascribing his expedition to political business, he next morning took leave of Ethel and started for the north.

His destination was Franklin Hall, where he arrived on the evening of the third day. His interview with Sir Richard was a long one ; its results will be told hereafter.

He rested at Woodhouse that night. Mistress Elizabeth had heard nothing of recent events and imputed his sudden appearance to his having received news of Ethel's flight.

She scarcely waited to greet him before she began to speak of that event, but he abruptly stopped her.

"I know all," he said ; "and Ethel is in London under my protection."

The sudden pallor and disturbance of her countenance at once convinced him that his worst suspicions were well founded. She had not the courage to put another question, and he would not proffer any information, but he informed his faithful friend Greenwood of all that had happened. Although neither uttered it in words, each could perceive that his opinion of Elizabeth's share in the abduction was identical.

The next morning Wentworth proceeded to York, where he spent two days upon State affairs, and then set forward on his return to London.

He found Ethel greatly pleased with her new domicile and more cheerful and contented than he had known her for some time ; and she could not but observe that his manner towards her was more free and unrestrained than it had ever been before.

One day, after a long interview with the King, he sought her in some excitement.

"I shall shortly leave England," he said, "for it has pleased his Majesty to add another to his many gracious favours, and appoint me Deputy Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland. Therefore our marriage must take place before I leave, for thou shalt go with me."

"I am glad of this," answered Ethel, blushing ; "I am glad we shall leave England and be far away from *her*."

"Tush, tush !" he replied, a little irritably ; "it is time to forget that."

"I can never forget her terrible face," rejoined Ethel, shuddering.

Wentworth made no reply, for that remembrance had not yet been banished from his own memory.

In the meantime, he had taken a handsome mansion some distance out of London for Ethel's accommodation, and for the children, who had been brought up from Woodhouse. He remained at his lodgings in Whitehall, and in all his intercourse with her was most cautious and punctilious, so as to avoid scandal as much as possible, although to evade entirely the licence of evil tongues he knew to be impossible. He had likewise endeavoured to remove all mystery—that most fruitful source of calumny—from about her, by stating that she was the daughter of a country knight, and had been confided to his care on the death of her parents. Hornby had never been a frequenter of the Court, and the name of Rhodes had long since been a forgotten one.

With all his caution, however, it soon began to be bruited abroad that my Lord Wentworth was about to be married to a lady of whose family and parentage no one knew anything, and this soon grew into a Court wonder. The King gravely questioned him upon the matter, upon which he confided to his Majesty the story of Ethel's life. Charles listened to it with great interest, marvelling all the time at discovering so much romance and gentle sentiment in that stern soul. The picture which Wentworth drew of Ethel's sweetness and devotion greatly touched him, for there was a vein of deep sentiment in Charles's nature.

"I can well sympathise with your feelings, Wentworth," he said; "nevertheless, I would have preferred that you had made an alliance with some noble house and thereby strengthened your position. But I would love to see the lady who has so captivated thy heart."

Wentworth hesitated. For many reasons, your Majesty," he answered, "I would wish to keep my marriage private for a time, and should therefore prefer not to bring her to Court at present."

"Doubtless you are right," replied the King; "but I must see her before you leave for Ireland."

Of all Ethel's life this was the sweetest and happiest period. Day by day she could feel Wentworth's soul folding closer and closer about her own; and in that dear presence

and with the companionship of his children her content was absolute, although at times the memory of Lady Carlisle's baleful visage and terrible threats would still cross her sunshine like a dark cloud.

The beginning of April was the time fixed for Wentworth's departure, and he arranged that their marriage should be celebrated a few days previously. The ceremony was to be privately performed at a village church near the mansion at which she was residing. Sir George Radcliffe and a few of the officers of his household were to be the only witnesses.

It was on the last day of March, a bleak gloomy morning without one ray of sunshine, that he led her to the altar.

"The heavens do not smile upon us," she said, with a melancholy smile.

"But have we not sunshine enough within," he responded fondly.

The next day he privately introduced his bride to the King, who was much struck by her beauty and sweetness of manner.

"Madam," he said, in his most gracious tone, "I wish you all happiness."

Instinctively her eyes full of gentle confidence were turned upon her husband.

The King caught the glance and interpreted it. "And of that," he added, "your choice has well assured you."

CHAPTER V

GONE ! NO ONE KNEW WHITHER.

IN the meantime, what had become of Launcelot Franklin ?

All the day that followed the night on which Pym had made his strange disclosure he waited at home expecting a visit from Hornby. The next morning he sought him at his customary haunts but could hear no tidings of him. That same evening two letters were brought him by two separate messengers. The superscription upon the first was in a bold straggling hand, and upon opening it he found it to be from the very man whom he had been so anxiously seeking. 'Wondering what could induce him to write he opened the letter and read as follows :

" Strange things have happened to me since we last met. By the time you get this I shall be on my way out of England never to return. We shall never meet again. You *must* give up all hope of Ethel. Wentworth is going to make her his wife. She seems—strange fancy !—to have conceived an affection for him. Make no attempt to hold further communication with her, for *mark me, even had this not been she could never have been your wife !* Drive all love for her out of your heart as though it were a *deadly sin, which it is*. I can give you no explanation. Farewell.

" GODFREY HORNBY."

Even the shock of the announcement which for ever

crushed his hopes could not wholly subdue a feeling of curious wonderment at this strange and to him inexplicable letter. He read it through a second and a third time without obtaining any clue to its mystery.

Sick at heart, he turned to the second epistle.

It was from Ethel. Tender and pitiful, knowing not how to strike the blow, she told him that she had returned to my Lord Wentworth's protection ; that all communication must henceforth and for ever cease between them ; that she was about to form new ties ; that he might shortly hear news that would surprise him ; that she should always feel for him a sister's affection ; that when he could regard her in that light none would be more welcome to her. "I pray," she said, "that I have never wantonly deluded you with false hopes ; and yet I fear I may have done so. If I have, I pray God and you to forgive me, for it was in my foolishness and my ignorance. It is only now I have learned what love is, only now I can read my own heart aright ; all before was groping in the dark. My conscience does not hold me clear. You will find another who will love you as dearly as your virtues deserve."

Here was the confirmation of Hornby's words—the end of hope. And he had never known until then how far he had hitherto been from despair.

The next day he wrote a brief letter to his father, saying that he had relinquished the study of the law and made up his mind to quit England to seek for some more active employment abroad.

A few hours afterwards he had left the Temple for ever. Gone ! No one knew whither.

Book VII.—The Gathering of the Storm.

PROEM.

IRELAND, 1632.

AN April sun was fast sinking in a serene and almost cloudless sky, flashing upon the river and upon the distant bay, empurpling with fantastic light and shadow the far-away mountains, and gilding the crumbling lichen-stained walls of Dublin Castle. It was a scene of savage desolation; a wild uncultivated country, dotted here and there beyond the city with a few squalid mud huts, a few ragged figures savage as the land that bred them, overgrown hedges, reed-covered morasses broken by stagnant pools—it was a primitive world, upon which there was little impress of man's hand.

City and country were in harmony; narrow filthy streets paved with dirt, rotten wooden houses that threatened to crush the passer-by. The people wandered hither and thither listlessly, or loitered at corners, or sat upon door-steps, or crept into patches of sunshine; no life, no energy anywhere; all was decay and stagnation. On the mound above rose the ancient castle, the ruined walls of which were a fit emblem of the authority they enclosed. The courtyard was broken and grass-grown; the worm-eaten doors and rusty gates were hingeless; the halls and corridors mouldy and vault-like; the chambers were mouldering dust heaps; the windows were formless gaps—save where

the sheltering ivy had crept across—through which came wind and snow and rain. A few aged domestics that looked like the ghosts of better days doomed to wander among the scenes they had inhabited in life; a small number of half-clad ruffians dignified by the name of soldiers who kept revel but no guard, had constituted the sole occupants of the place until the arrival of a portion of the retinue of the new Lord Deputy. Then the least ruinous part of the Castle was sought and masons and carpenters and other handicraftsmen pressed from all parts to repair and make it habitable; furniture was dragged out from beneath mountains of dust, and cleansed and furbished up. The result was miserable enough, but nothing more could be done until the arrival of my Lord Wentworth.

Ethel, under the protection of Sir George Radcliffe, had already arrived. She had left England on the day after her marriage and in order to avoid publicity and much ceremonial he had sent her on before him. On the morning of this day she had received the news that his vessel was in the harbour, and she was now anxiously watching at the window for the first glimpse of his retinue.

The sun had just touched the edge of the horizon when she caught sight of a troop of horsemen ascending the hills. Waiting to see no more she flew down the staircase and in another moment was standing at the grand entrance peering eagerly among the coming soldiers and domestics for that majestic form, her fair hair floating in the wind, her fair face all aglow with eager expectancy. At last it came; he raised his hat in token of recognition. Scarcely could she refrain from rushing forward among the horses and men, but she knew that it would offend his sense of punctiliousness that would not endure even from her such a breach of ceremony. And so she had to wait until he had dismounted and slowly ascended the steps. She would have thrown herself upon his breast, but he restrained the movement by taking her hand and gently kissing her brow; his proud sensitive nature shrank from all effusiveness before others.

"This is a poor bridal home, sweetheart," he said, looking around the gloomy ill-furnished chamber, when they were alone; "but it shall soon be mended."

"It was before you came," she murmured, laying her

head upon his shoulder, "but now it seems transformed into a palace; all places are alike to me where thou art. But how pale and worn you look," she said anxiously; "nothing has happened to disturb you?"

"Nothing, darling," he answered, kissing her fondly, "unless it be the sea passage. You know I am not the robustest of men."

Soon he was called away to preside at a Council of the Lords Justices who had come to initiate him into the condition and duties of his government.

"Your lordship has come to no bed of roses," said one, "and I fear me, like all who have come before you, will soon wish yourself back in England."

"Not until my task be performed," he replied austere.

Most appalling were the statements that each laid before him. The people were scarcely removed from savages; the country was overrun with hordes of robbers; the coasts were ravaged by foreign pirates who burned, plundered, carried the inhabitants off into slavery, drove away all trade, pillaged merchants' ships, murdered the crews, and then audaciously cast anchor in the nearest port, where the authorities dared not attack them. Worse than all, many of these authorities connived in their infamies and shared in the plunder. The army was without weapons, powder, or discipline—a mere mob of marauders, who robbed and abused the defenceless people they were employed to protect; the commanding officers delegated their duties to subalterns who never performed them. The churches were in ruins and were used for stabling horses. These were a few of the grievances and abuses that were laid before my Lord Deputy.

The justices were amazed to see the unmoved countenance with which he heard these things, for they had expected to read there dismay and perturbation.

"My lords," he said, when they had read the last report, "all this is no news to me; I have made myself acquainted with the true condition of this unhappy country long before to-day, and I have come here to cure these evils; to bring it under the control of law and order, to root out anarchy, crime, and corruption, to revive commerce and the cultivation of the land,—in brief to restore prosperity and the finances of the King."

"If your lordship accomplishes all this, the labours of Hercules will be no more remembered," answered one of the justices with a doubtful smile.

"And with God's help I will do it," he replied sternly. "And hark ye, my lords, those who are not with me, who do not help me in all I do, performing my behests with implicit obedience and with their whole hearts, are against me—my enemies, and as such I shall treat them, not sparing them. Send out summonses to all soldiers and officers who are absent to return to quarters within twenty-four hours on pain of death; the first man who disobeys I will have shot. All officers of the King caught engaged in or conniving at corrupt practices I will have hanged without judge or jury, or hang those that let them 'scape. I will have these hordes of robbers hunted down like wild beasts and exterminated as we do wolves. And until these things are done the work of regeneration cannot begin."

"But these things cannot be done without power to enforce them," suggested another of the lords humbly.

"That shall not be lacking. I have brought a few trusty followers with me, and others will shortly arrive. But an inexorable will can work miracles amongst anarchists with very small help."

My Lords Justices went away crestfallen, full of wonder, and not without some trembling.

CHAPTER I.

IRELAND, 1639.

SEVEN years have passed away since that April evening on which my Lord Deputy landed in Ireland and entered upon his government. And he has fully redeemed his pledge. He has long since accomplished those labours which my Lords Justices so cynically declared would outshine those of Hercules, and many others which appeared then equally impracticable. A few months sufficed him to establish order and obedience to the laws. Within those seven years he had created a powerful and well-disciplined army, a fleet of war ships manned by well-trained sailors, who destroyed and dispersed the swarms of pirates and restored safety to the coast; a man laden with gold might travel unmolested from one end of the land to the other, so rigidly were the laws executed upon all marauders. He had sunk mines for saltpetre and silver; he had introduced the cultivation of flax and the manufacture of linen and flannel, and contemplated many other vast commercial schemes. He had raised the customs revenue from twelve to forty thousand pounds; and, whereas, before he arrived in this country it could not furnish the cost of its own government, it now produced an income of sixty thousand pounds in excess of its expenditure.

The Castle, described a few pages back as a crumbling ruin, was now transformed into a splendid and august Court; its lately mouldering walls were hung with choice

tapestry, silken hangings, and choice pictures; its floors were covered with costly furniture brought from Italy; its halls and corridors were filled with servants and pages in gorgeous liveries, its chambers with bejewelled and bedizened ladies and gentlemen.

But this was not his house; he used the Castle only for state occasions. Accustomed to the pure air of the country neither he nor Ethel could endure the polluted atmosphere of towns, laden as it was in those days with stench and corruption. So he had built himself a palace some sixteen miles from Dublin, which he called Juggarstowne Castle, and the ruins of which may still be traced. It was a pile of immense grandeur and extent, covering several acres and furnished and appointed in a style of princely magnificence.

In a spacious apartment of this mansion on an April evening in the year 1639, before a table covered with letters, papers, books, and despatches, sat my Lord Wentworth. The hand of Time had lain heavily upon him during those seven years, bending his form, bleaching his hair, and ploughing furrows of care and sickness upon his brow and cheeks; the dark eyes had lost none of their fire, but they were sunken in deeper hollows. The unceasing labours and anxieties of his office had shattered a constitution never robust, afflicting it with a complication of diseases the effects of which were not confined to the body; the shaking hand, the nervous twitch of the muscles of the face showed how deeply they had affected a temperament naturally irritable and passionate. On the other side of the table, busily writing, sat his secretary and friend, Sir George Radcliffe.

Seated in the deep oriel window, just behind the gentlemen, a book resting upon her knee, her face turned anxiously towards her dear lord, was my Lady Wentworth. Time had dealt more gently with her, although he had wrought much change; not impairing her beauty, however, which years had only matured and perfected, imparting a stateliness and dignity to the girlish loveliness.

Wentworth was reading a voluminous epistle, written in a close cramped hand, over which he uttered occasional ejaculations of impatience and vexation. Each time the secretary raised his head with an inquiring look, but not venturing upon a direct interrogation until his august master had finished the perusal.

Then he asked :

“What news from England, my lord?”

“Bad—bad, Radcliffe,” was the answer; “the Scotch are still in rebellion, and I fear me his Majesty’s tenderness of heart and national feelings will hinder him from acting with due vigour. Oh that I were beside him now! With a thousand stout English hearts under my command I would bring these presumptuous beggars to their knees, and make these canting Presbyterian rogues eat their Covenant from the point of my sword. I fear me his Grace of Canterbury,” he went on, “has been over hasty, however, in advising his Majesty to force the Liturgy upon their churches. I love not religious persecution; men’s consciences ever revolt against force. My administration in this country has been stigmatised as cruel and tyrannical, but although encompassed by a bigotry that might well have excused persecution, it hath not pleased his Majesty, through me his servant, to touch a hair of any man’s head for the free exercise of his conscience.”

He again turned to the perusal of the letter. Presently an angry colour dyed his face, and he burst forth: “There seems to be no falsehood too damnable for the invention of slander! Here I am told mine enemies accuse me of squandering the King’s revenue and oppressing the people of this country for mine own magnificence. You can bear witness, Sir George, how false is such an accusation; how often I have discharged the pay of soldiers and sailors out of my own private purse rather than drain his Majesty’s narrow resources; and his Majesty can attest that during the ten years of my government I have received scarcely seven thousand pounds for all my labours.”

“Such falsehoods, my lord, are so easily controverted that they should scarcely excite your anger,” replied the secretary. “But has his Grace of Canterbury sent you any news touching the title you petitioned for?”

“Yes; his Majesty has refused it for the present,” he answered coldly.

Sir George bit his lip, but ventured on no reply.

Putting the letter carefully on one side Wentworth next turned to a pile of papers, petitions, and documents of various kinds which Radcliffe had laid aside for his perusal. All this time Ethel was casting furtive and anxious glances upon his

worn and jaded face that seemed to grow paler and more haggard with each paper he read.

At length he caught her look, and throwing aside the documents exclaimed, with a sudden change of tone: "Enough of politics and grievances for to-day, for I have yet to answer the letters of my dear old friends Jones and Vandyke."

"And have they yet become converts to your lordship's opinions?" inquired Radcliffe.

"Not at all, to judge by these letters," replied Wentworth. "Old Inigo fights as obstinately as ever for the Italian *versus* the Gothic architecture, but he has changed from the argumentative to the rhapsodical, a proof that his defence is growing weak. I must answer this at once, for he has committed himself to inaccurate statements by which I shall greatly damage, if not carry, his position. Give me those books I was reading yesterday."

"Oh my dear lord," interposed Ethel, crossing to him and putting her arms about his neck, "do not write any more to-day; you look pale and jaded with fatigue now; indeed you overtax your strength which has been so sorely tried by sickness of late."

"Nay, sweetheart," he answered, caressing her, "this is recreation, and is to me a rest as refreshing as the *dolce far niente* is to idle men. Go and sit down again for a while and then I will read to thee till supper-time."

And then with an evident zest he set to writing a long letter full of learned arguments and quotations.

"There," he said, when he had finished; "Vandyke shall wait until to-morrow, for I see that imploring face of thine growing longer with every stroke of my pen. And you, Radcliffe, put aside your papers; we will have no more work of any kind to-day."

Upon which Ethel's face cleared and grew bright and cheerful.

"You shall read me," she said, nestling close to him, "my favourite canto of the Faerie Queen, the story of Una and the Red-cross Knight. The children love to hear that; shall I have them in?"

"Certainly, the darlings," he answered.

"I will bring them," said Sir George.

In a couple of minutes there ran in a fine handsome boy,

of ten or twelve, the image of his father, and two girls both younger than he. They all still live much as they were then in Vandyke's picture. The three gathered about their father, the boy leaned upon his shoulder, and he took a girl upon each knee, kissing and fondling them, calling them his dear little Nan, and his darling Arabella, for he passionately loved his children.

"How like they are to their dear sainted mother," he said, turning to Ethel with moistened eyes.

She turned away her head to conceal the tears which were coursing each other down her cheeks. He understood her emotion, and clasped her hand. She was thinking of her own little child who had brightened her life only one brief year.

"Those whom the gods love die young," he said sadly. "Our little Tom is happier than we can ever be, for God has taken him pure and sinless to His bosom. Of such are the angels. Who knows what sorrows and afflictions may be in store for these dear ones which God has spared him. Think of that and be comforted."

"Don't cry, dear mother," said little Nan, running to her and laying a tearful face against hers. "Mr. Greenwood says that if we are good we shall all meet little Tom again when we go to heaven."

"I hope so, darling," she answered, kissing the child and trying to smile through her tears.

"But this is not reading the Faerie Queen," broke in Wentworth, anxious to change the current of her thoughts.

When the reading was over the children were sent to bed and the elders repaired to supper. The meal was plain and substantial, the appointments such as befitted his great position, but not unduly ostentatious. When he resided at the Castle, however, everything was courtly and magnificent and his guests were numerous—such as he considered indispensable to the King's vicegerent. Here, only such as he esteemed personal friends were gathered around his board.

The meal was discussed with free and pleasant conversation; after it was over pipes and tobacco were brought in, and no one took his tobacco with more enjoyment than did the host; no one was more pleasant, more humorous; those who had met him only as the stern, unbending, haughty

Lord Lieutenant would have failed to recognise him as the same personage, so complete was the metamorphosis. State affairs were forbidden subjects after supper. The talk was of art, antiquities, literature, or such amusing adventures as the company might have encountered during the day. And frequently the evening was wound up with a game of *Primero*, in which he took much pleasure.

At four the next morning he and his secretary were again in the library writing despatches.

After breakfast, which was at eight o'clock, he rode to Dublin, where he was to hold that day a reception and a court of justice. Never before had the old Castle been the scene of so splendid a Court; there was no Christian monarch in Europe so omnipotent, none to whom more obsequious homage was paid; the proudest there trembled beneath his frown, and fawned beneath his smile; and, courtier-like, the hearts of all were filled with malice and envy against his power, as he was to discover too well thereafter.

How rigid and exacting he was in all forms of ceremony has been several times noted in the course of this narrative. In public his cold *hauteur*, his inflexible sternness repelled and affronted all who, not having access to his domestic circle, knew not the warmer nature which he reserved for his friends. As in England, his administration of justice was truly impartial, leaning always to the side of the poor and weak rather than to that of the rich and powerful; but this, untempered as it was by any graciousness or outward show of sympathy, lost all its value in the minds of the impulsive Celts; and even those who benefited most by it had but a muttered curse for "Black Tom," as they nicknamed him. And he was pitiless as he was just; for his sentence once pronounced no prayers could move him. His sentences were too frequently terribly severe, especially of late since painful diseases had racked and tortured a mind, always intensely irritable, almost to madness; in these physical sufferings lay the germs of those acts of unbridled tyranny which his enemies thereafter turned to such terrible account against him.

At twelve he dined in state, and Lady Wentworth, who had followed him late in the morning, sat on his right hand.

In the variety of the dishes, the splendour of the plate, the gorgeous liveries of the attendants, the magnificence of the apartment, although not perhaps in the quality and opulence of the guests, this banquet would not have shamed Whitehall. Serene and self-possessed he dispensed his hospitality with the grace and dignity of a monarch, showing no sign, even to the watchful eyes of his partner, that all this time he was racked by pain and worn with fatigue. The infirmities of the body found no indulgence from that iron will. Scarcely was the banquet finished when the arrival of despatches from the King was announced ; upon which he, accompanied by his ever-attendant secretary, retired to a private apartment to learn their contents.

"The King commands my presence in England," he said, addressing Radcliffe. "That is good news ; for now I shall be able to confront my enemies and give the lie to their slanders in my master's presence."

"I trust, my lord, their malice may not overbear your truth."

"That is as it may please God," he answered ; "and if I fall it is in the service of my sovereign." He paused thoughtfully for many minutes.

"There is a danger must be guarded against," he resumed, "before I leave for England. Those Ulster settlers may send succours to their Scottish brethren. See that some eight hundred to a thousand men under the bravest and trustiest officer you can find be despatched thither at once ; force them to renounce the Covenant, imprison all those who show the least disaffection, and deprive them of all means of serving against us. The troops must start by daybreak to-morrow morning ; no one must be informed of their destination, and tell the commanding officer I hold his life in pledge for the faithful execution of his commission. Sir Christopher Windebanke will be my deputy during my absence. I leave the rest to your fidelity, old friend, upon which I know I can rely."

"As upon yourself, my dear lord," was the answer fervently delivered.

"I know it," replied Wentworth, warmly grasping his hand.

"Let me go with you," said Ethel beseechingly,

when he told her the news. "I could not endure that you should be in the midst of your enemies and the sea between us."

Wentworth hesitated a little, and then answered :

"Be it so, for I may need the comfort of your love, dearest, in the coming struggle."

CHAPTER II.

THE COMING OF THE LION.

It was a reception-night at Lady Carlisle's, and her *salon* was crowded with much the same kind of company as that which Wentworth had met there some nine years before; poets, artists, philosophers, politicians, courtiers. Seven winters had not passed over that stately head without leaving some impress of their passage. The figure had lost something of its grace in the increased voluptuousness of its contour, the features some of their refinement, for the coarser elements of our nature grow more conspicuous with years, and all the appliances of art could not conceal a certain haggardness which strong passions rather than time had wrought there. But Waller and Suckling, and a host of poetasters, still sang the praises of her beauty, and young courtiers still eagerly contended for her smiles, as why should they not? for her fascinations were as potent as ever.

Pym was there: the breach with Wentworth had once more reconciled them, but only of late, for the wound had taken long to heal. They were drawn together by the sympathy of hate, by a correspondence of aims which coalesced in one object—the destruction of one man. Time had not softened the desire of revenge in either, but rather intensified it. With the man it had a double root, his

political convictions alone would have sufficed to render him implacable to one who had deserted his party, and whose genius was its greatest danger; but he had also been his preferred rival in the heart of her he loved.

It would not have been even in a good woman's nature to forgive the affront which Wentworth had put upon Lady Carlisle; truly, she had incurred it by her own duplicity; but women never reason, they only feel; and to one so proud and passionate as she such an injury was the deadliest that could be inflicted. It had struck her at all points; pride, self-love, ambition, passion. She had never quite recovered that terrible blow; she had kept her own counsel, never referring to it, and she had bribed and threatened, as far as it was possible, her domestics into silence; she had also absented herself from the Court for nearly a year; but she knew the story had oozed out, she could *feel* the jests, the laughter, the sarcasms which were bandied about at her expense, and more than once her own sex had cast it up in innuendoes, and so it never ceased burning and rankling in her soul and increasing her desire for vengeance. And yet she might have forgiven her disappointed hopes, even her lacerated pride, had there been no Ethel. The ever-torturing thought was that another, and that other one whom she despised whom she had so nearly circumvented—and in her defeat lay more bitterness—should enjoy the love she so desired, possess the honours she so coveted. She had sent spies into Ireland to pry upon their domesticity, hoping to find him weary and repentant of his choice, and the triumph of such a discovery would have softened something of her hate; but every report told her of their happiness, of his love and her devotion. Each repetition of such news came upon her like a fresh insult, for she had felt so assured that his passion for this unknown girl was but a passing fancy that would die in its gratification. The birth of a child was wormwood to her, for it bound them together by a new and stronger link; its death filled her with joy, for it brought affliction upon *her*.

To Pym and his confederates her aid was invaluable, since it penetrated to persons and places otherwise beyond their reach, notably the King and Queen;

over the last she had gradually acquired an indirect but powerful influence and thereby reached Charles himself. It may appear strange that one whose connection with a most bitter opponent of the Court was now notorious should have gained so much trust from her sovereign mistress. But in this she played a most subtle part, pretending to betray her lover's secrets, and occasionally furnishing scraps of authentic information, all being previously arranged among the party, so as to inspire confidence.

Nor did the Queen examine too curiously, for the gratification of some petty malice or headstrong humour of the moment would with her ever outweigh for the time the safety of the future. She had never liked Wentworth ; his grandeur, his genius oppressed her poor little mean soul. What a pity it was that all the children of the great Henry should have taken nothing from the father, but inherited all from the worthless imbecile mother. And she soon became jealous of the power he had acquired over the King, a power which, from the very dissimilarity of the two minds, must in all things be antagonistic to her own. It wanted but a very shallow plotter to irritate this jealousy to hatred ; such a task was scarcely worthy of such subtle brains as those employed upon it. They contrived that Wentworth should continually oppose himself to the Queen's wishes, and then impressed upon her the idea that his opposition arose not so much from a difference of policy as from a settled design to humiliate her and destroy her influence with the King. And this last point touched her nearest, for no woman was ever more eager, or worked harder to obtain absolute empire over her husband's mind, and through him over the kingdom.

It was easy enough to find among the courtiers, male and female, numbers who hated and envied Wentworth for his great fortune, who were ready enough to enter into any cabal to destroy his credit, so Lady Carlisle soon gathered about her a strong body of aiders and abettors to help on her plot. Charles held to his noble servant far more loyally than they anticipated ; yet nevertheless the slanders of enemies were not without effect. He frequently thwarted his wisest measures, even annulled his decrees and appoint-

ments, and evaded all things that would tend to enlarge his influence and authority. It was this petty jealousy which caused him to refuse the title which Wentworth had solicited, even though it was eloquently pleaded for by Laud himself.

There was something like consternation in Lady Carlisle's face when on this evening news was brought her by one of her spies at Court that the King had written to command Wentworth's presence in England. Very soon it was passed from mouth to mouth that the terrible Lord Deputy had been sent for, and the smile died upon many a lip and the colour faded from many a cheek, and many a one who had been most brave in threats and scorn quaked with fear at the thought of meeting the lion.

"I am right glad to hear it," cried Vandyke, who was present, "for he is needed."

And he cast a significant glance round upon the company. Several—chiefly the artistic and literary portion of the guests—echoed the sentiment.

"Ay, you are wise in your generation," retorted Pym scornfully; "you spoilers of honest canvas and defilers of fair paper have ever been the friends of despots; your idle uselessness would find shelter under no others."

"Better a despotism in which intellect has some part—than one of brute force," replied Vandyke.

Pym sneered, but condescended to no further parley.

"You must still work upon the Queen to oppose with all her power the title he covets," he said apart to Lady Carlisle.

"But I fear the advocacy of Laud will prove too strong for us."

"Before long that priest of Baal shall want, and want in vain an advocate for himself. Both the tyrants shall perish together. Press also the disgrace of Sir John Coke and the appointment of Sir Harry Vane, whom Wentworth hates, to his post. Hamilton has already counselled this; but you must so work upon the Queen that she shall make Sir Harry's cause her own, and his appointment a personal affair; for in this I will make a pitfall for my Lord Deputy into which he shall fall headlong. His love of Coke and his hatred of Vane will stir him to a strong partisanship, which

will thus be employed to thwart the Queen ; this will embitter her present dislike to him and render her implacable. We must unceasingly feed this disposition, and the weak uxorious Charles will never long hold out against her determined will."

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE KING REWARDED DEVOTION.

IMMEDIATELY upon landing in England Wentworth commenced his journey to London and arrived there without allowing himself any rest upon the road. Not waiting even to change his travel-stained dress he presented himself at Whitehall and was at once admitted to a private interview with the King.

Charles received him with every demonstration of affection, calling him his dear cousin and truest friend, and expressing his gratification at the good work he had accomplished in Ireland. This done he at once proceeded to the subject that engrossed all his thoughts—the rebellion in Scotland and the emptiness of his treasury.

“If your Majesty will deign to be guided by my counsel I have thought of a means by which I believe your present wants may be supplied,” said Wentworth.

“Speak, my good Wentworth, such a preface is unnecessary.”

“Your Majesty is aware that I have great power among the Yorkshire gentry—enough, I believe, to induce them to willingly consent to subscribe to a loan, and even pay ship-money to carry on the war; and in order to encourage them I will open the undertaking by subscribing twenty thousand pounds myself.”

“I have no words to show you how deeply I appreciate this magnificent generosity,” replied the King in a tone of real

feeling. "Had I but half a dozen such subjects as you I might defy a whole nation of traitors."

"I trust your Majesty has thousands such," replied Wentworth.

"I may be able to requite your loyalty one day," resumed the King. "You left Ireland tranquil and in the hands of those upon whom you can depend?"

Wentworth related all the steps he had taken for the security of that country and to prevent the Scotch Presbyterians assisting the Covenanters, at which Charles expressed profound satisfaction.

After this there was a pause, during which the King fumbled among some papers that lay before him with the air of a man who has something embarrassing upon his mind. When he spoke it was with hesitation.

"You sent us," he said, adopting the regal style, "a list of gentlemen whom you prayed us to appoint to certain offices which have fallen vacant."

"Such was my humble petition."

"We fear it cannot be granted," continued the King, fumbling yet more uneasily among the papers, and carefully avoiding Wentworth's eye, "for we had already through our secretaries promised those offices to certain persons to whom we desire to extend our favour."

"May it please your Majesty to remember that upon honouring me with my commission of Lord Deputy you gave me a solemn promise that all patronage in reference to Ireland should rest in my hands."

"We do remember your requiring some such promise," replied the King coldly; "but the exigences of state affairs demand a latitude in these cases."

"The gentlemen I have selected are specially fitted for the posts in which I would place them from their knowledge of the people, the country, and my mode of administration; and Ireland is in all particulars so opposite to England that men not having such knowledge may do much injury by unconscious blunders."

Wentworth spoke earnestly, and the King looked embarrassed and undecided.

"We recommend to you all the gentlemen named in this paper most heartily and earnestly," he said, passing him a document; "but," he added, "*only* so far as they may agree

with the good of our service, not otherwise. Yet, *so too as I may have thanks howsoever it may be; and if there be anything to be denied you may do it and not I.*"

A blush rose to Wentworth's face—a blush of shame for his royal master, and he answered sadly: "I will do my best to carry out your Majesty's desires."

"And now," resumed the King, in a tone of relief at the settlement of a disagreeable affair, "there is another subject upon which I would speak while we are alone—the title you have solicited."

"Your Majesty," answered Wentworth, finding he paused for an answer, "believe me I do not covet the bauble of a coronet for the gratification of my own vanity but for the honour and glory of your service, to strengthen my authority over the Irish, to prove to my enemies that their malice has no weight with you. Such a mark of favour would silence all their spirits and set me right again in the opinion of all. Long since your Majesty was pleased to promise me such a favour."

"Believe me, Wentworth," replied the King evasively, "the marks of favour that stop malicious tongues are neither places nor titles, but the little welcome I give the accusers and the willing ear I give to my servants. Let me give you a rule," he added, assuming a half-jesting tone, that sat but ill upon him, "that will serve for statesman, courtier, or lover: never make a defence or apology before you be accused."

It was thus that Charles rewarded the services of the most devoted subject ever king had.

Wentworth bowed and changed the subject.

"There is a suit I would make to your Majesty; not for myself, but for another, an old and faithful servant of your royal father's, who has now added to the weight of fourscore years your Majesty's displeasure. I speak of Sir Edward Coke, who I hear is about to be deprived of his office for some fault which is not clearly proved against him."

"The fault was a grave one," answered the King sternly; "his negligence in drawing the stipulations between ourself and our Scotch subjects has embroiled us in the present war."

"If that be the case his offence is indeed a grave one. But I hear it rumoured that his post is to be bestowed upon Sir Harry Vane."

“Such is her Majesty’s and Hamilton’s express desire.”

“Then let me beseech your Majesty to pause before committing yourself to such a nomination,” cried Wentworth, with almost impassioned earnestness; “he is utterly unworthy of your favour—a man, coarse, illiterate, and incapable of fulfilling the duties of such an office; you could not make a more fatal choice. If you think my poor services deserving any reward grant me this petition.”

The King hesitated, he knew this character of Vane to be the true one, he was himself unwilling for such a choice, and scarcely knew how to refuse Wentworth so small a favour.

“Well, at your desire,” he said presently, “Coke shall retain his place.”

“Your Majesty could not have more deeply obliged me.”

The interview over, Wentworth, worn out with the fatigues of the last few days, and racked with pain which asserted its power now that the excitement was over, went away to the lodgings prepared for his reception.

Yet by sunrise the next morning he had commenced his journey to Yorkshire.

CHAPTER IV.

NEVERMORE !

WENTWORTH had left Ethel and the children at Chester with the greater part of his retinue, and thence they proceeded on to Woodhouse, where they arrived several days before him.

It was nearly eight years since she had last looked upon that dear spot of earth which held all the most cherished memories of her life. It was a cold sombre day on which she arrived ; the half-fledged trees shivered in the bleak air and the great building looked gray and frowning. Many old familiar faces were there to greet her with loving welcome ; but there were many that she missed who were now sleeping their last sleep. Mistress Elizabeth had continued to reside in the old solitary mansion during all these years. No explanation, indeed no word concerning Ethel's flight had ever passed between her and her brother ; there was a tacit understanding that their friendly relations would be best preserved by avoiding the subject. She had long since repented her share in the plot ; and although there might have lingered a secret wish in her heart that he had looked higher, she had become quite reconciled to his union with Ethel. Thus her greeting to the new mistress was as kindly and cordial as her cold nature would allow.

Hand-in-hand with Nan and Arabella, the boy Will going on in front, Ethel wandered through the dear familiar chambers trying to call back reminiscences to their young

memories ; but failing with all but Will ; and his were uncertain and shadowy. In the picture-gallery she stopped before the portrait of a noble-looking and beautiful lady.

"Tell me, darlings," she asked in a low voice, "do you remember that lady?"

The girls shook their heads ; but the boy, after gazing at it attentively for a moment, said :

"That must be our mother of whom you are always talking to us."

"It is," answered Ethel ; "the dearest, kindest, noblest lady that God ever sent upon earth. When she was dying it was her wish that I should be your second mother ; for she so loved me that she picked me out of all the world as the one to whom she would confide you—her most precious treasures. Oh dear mistress," she cried, addressing the picture, "have I proved worthy of your sacred trust?"

"You have," answered a voice close beside her.

She started back awe-struck, almost fancying her appeal had awakened the dead. The children clung round her in terror ; but their fears were soon relieved by seeing Mistress Elizabeth emerge out of the dim shadows, for it was evening. She grasped both Ethel's hands and kissed her, leaving a tear upon her face.

"Never was such a trust so tenderly and nobly fulfilled," she said, her hard voice trembling with emotion. "My brother was right, there is something above blood and pedigree after all ; his choice is well justified."

"Whatever of good there is in me I owe it to her teachings," answered Ethel. "Ah, would she had lived ; for I was only fit to be her handmaiden."

"You are a noble creature," replied Mistress Elizabeth ; "and for whatever wrong I did you in the past I ask your forgiveness."

And from that time forth until the end she showed her tenderness of a mother.

The next day Ethel took the children to see their mother's grave. The last time she had stood upon that spot was the evening on which Wentworth had surprised her there and asked her to be his wife. It was to her a spot doubly sacred—sacred alike to the dead and to the living. She wished to be alone there ; the children's whispered

prattle disturbed her thoughts. So she sent them homeward under the care of their attendants, saying she would shortly follow.

As some half-hour afterwards she slowly quitted the church the setting sun broke red and luridly through the gray mists that enveloped the heavens, casting a stormy light over the scene. She did not observe a gentleman clad in black loitering near the churchyard wall, and was unaware of his presence until he stood beside her and pronounced her name—"Lady Wentworth."

She started at the voice and raised her eyes; they fell upon a face which though much changed since she had seen it last, she instantly recognised as that of Launcelot Franklin. Its soft youthful beauty and almost feminine delicacy were gone, but a grander and nobler beauty had taken its place. The complexion was bronze, the outlines of the mouth firmer, the dark blue eyes which had lost much of their dreaminess had gained fire and steadiness. It was the countenance of a man who had been engaged in stirring scenes, who had been an actor in great events and played an important part in them.

"I saw you enter the church with the children," he said, baring his head, "and I thought I should like to speak to you once again. I trust you will not think me intrusive."

For a moment, and only for a moment, Ethel felt embarrassed at this unexpected meeting.

"Indeed, I am glad to see you, Mr. Franklin," she said, extending her hand to him.

He just touched the white fingers, bowing very low over them.

"I hope you have not had any loss," she said, glancing at his mourning.

"My father is dead," he replied; "my mother died two years ago. Did you not hear of it?"

"Indeed I did not, and I regret very much to hear it now. You have been away in foreign countries have you not?"

"Yes, I have been in the Swedish army. I returned only just in time to close my father's eyes."

"Then you will come to Woodhouse and pay us a visit will you not? My lord will be home in a few days——"

She stopped suddenly, feeling instinctively she had wounded him.

"I thank you, lady," he answered with some coldness, "but I leave for London to-morrow morning."

There was silence. Ethel walked on, not feeling quite so unembarrassed as she did a few minutes before and he still kept at her side.

"Eth—— Madam, I trust you are happy."

He spoke as though the words had, beyond the power of control, forced their way through his lips.

She stared at him in astonishment.

"Happy! How should I be otherwise?"

"I am glad to hear it," he answered fervently.

A question rose to her lips which like his would be spoken.

"Are you married, Mr. Franklin?"

She could have bitten her tongue out the moment it was uttered.

"I shall never marry," he answered.

She turned aside her head and a faint blush stole over her face, but the next moment her eyes were looking frankly and pityingly into his.

"It would be mere affectation in me," she said, "to pretend not to understand your words. Years ago I entreated you not to waste your life upon false hopes; I now entreat you not to waste it upon barren memories. I offered you then a sister's love; it is still yours if you will have it. I offer it in my own and my lord's name. He oftens speaks of you, and that with high praise. You would always be a welcome visitor to Woodhouse, or to any roof of which he is master."

Launcelot shook his head, but made no reply.

They were standing at the gate which led into the wood. The red sunlight which had illumined them for a moment slowly faded beneath the gray mists that closed over it leaden and sombre, and a cold stormy wind moaned fitfully through the trees.

"You should not waste your life in dreams of what might have been," she added gravely.

"My life is not that of a dreamer," he answered. "It has been full of action for many a year, and will still be so while it endures. I fulfil all the duties of a citizen save

one. I repeat, I shall never marry. But the night is coming on and you are unattended. I will not offer you my escort—it would not be seemly; and I know you to be safe within your own domains. The air, too, is cold. Farewell. We may never meet again.”

“I trust we may, and that I may yet find you happy in the affection you so well merit.”

“Happiness is given to few, but all men may find contentment,” he answered.

Once more she proffered him her hand; once more he gently touched it; and then with a sad heart she turned her steps homewards.

She cast one glance behind: he was standing just as she had left him, following her with his eyes; but on the instant he turned upon his heel and in the next was lost in the gray fog that was creeping up from the earth.

A few days afterwards Wentworth arrived, ill and jaded by fatigue.

One day he gave up to rest; on the next was to commence his self-imposed task. That day was to be a renewal for a few brief hours of that old tranquil life that seemed so far back in the past that it might have belonged to a previous state of existence, and so sweet because it could never be again, that it might have been a memory of heaven.

For an hour or two he indulged in his favourite sport of hawking; and after that he and Ethel wandered about the woods, revisiting all the old haunts, calling up all the old reminiscences so full of the tender melancholy of time. How lovingly they lingered among them!—what long wistful glances they cast behind, as though their eyes might never again rest upon them! It was a miserable spring; day after day the same leaden sky or cold drizzling rain. Perhaps it was this which cast such an ominous dejection over both, or perhaps it was the long dark shadows of the coming end.

“Oh my dear lord,” she said, “when this work is done why not resign your great employments and let us go back to our old tranquil life? You have not strength, nor has any man, to sustain such terrible burdens.”

“It is too late now for such thoughts,” he answered sadly; “a man can no more cast off the destiny he has once

chosen than he can recall yesterday. I have set my hand to the plough—God Almighty direct it in that way which may be most for His service and the King's."

They visited the old gray church and prayed over the tomb of her they had both loved so well. It was there they lingered longest, it was there the foreboding fell heaviest, and the sad inner voice pronounced the "Nevermore" loudest.

She told him of her meeting with Launcelot Franklin and all that passed between them word for word, as she could remember. He listened silently and attentively.

"How mysteriously things happen in this world!" he said presently. "Destiny plays strange tricks with us at times. You would never guess how closely that young man is associated with your own history. After supper I will relate to you a story I might have told you years ago."

"Indeed?" she said, looking wonderingly at him.

He made no answer, but fell into a deep reverie. And so in the gloaming of the dull evening they took their way silently homewards.

Never since their marriage had he and Ethel been so entirely alone together, except in the privacy of their chamber. Oh, if this could but last! was the thought of both, but to-morrow must come and with it separation, turmoil, and care.

Only themselves and Mistress Elizabeth sat down to the supper-table. Precise in all her habits, at a little before ten the former rose and with an affectionate good-night retired to her chamber.

Now they were alone.

Wentworth drew his chair closer to the logs that blazed upon the hearth and Ethel sat herself upon a low stool at his feet, her head resting upon his knees, her favourite position, and silently waited for him to begin the story he had promised—she had thought of nothing else since he had mentioned it.

For a time he lay back in his chair, thoughtfully watching the glowing embers drop from the great logs and cool into white ashes. All was intensely silent within the house. But without there were the sough of the trees and the fitful patter of rain as the wind drove it in gusts against the windows.

The tolling of the great clock aroused him.

"You have never since our marriage," he said, "put to me a single question touching your parentage, although before you seemed most anxious upon the subject."

"I thought you would tell me all in your own good time," she answered; "and what was it to me after I had become your wife?"

He lovingly stroked her head in his old way, and went on: "Had the subject been a pleasant one I should not have waited for questioning. But it must be told one day; this meeting with Launcelot Franklin has revived it in my mind, and it may be a long time before I shall again find an opportunity so favourable to speak on it.

"Briefly then," he began, "your father was Sir Godfrey Rhodes; your mother the daughter of a Mr. Wyndham, a gentleman of good family but poor. Sir Godfrey was left at twenty the heir to a fine estate; he fell in love with Alice Wyndham; her father regarding such a marriage as in every way advantageous advanced it with all his influence, forcing her to put aside the man she loved, one Richard Craston, a poor and somewhat wild young man who was dependent upon an uncle's bounty. Well, she became Sir Godfrey's wife; they were an ill-matched pair. He was a jealous violent-tempered man; she a vain passionate woman, with her heart given to another. Their life was an unhappy one. One day he made the acquaintance of Richard Craston and brought him home with him; he had never heard that this man had been his wife's lover; that fact had been carefully concealed by the father; and she knowing his jealous disposition dared not acquaint him with it now. So the two met as strangers. I will not dwell upon this part of a sad story. Of the three, your mother's share of the blame was the smallest. Craston was a villain; she still loved him; her life was miserable; he induced her to fly with him. But Nemesis saved her honour spite of herself. The plague was raging at the time, and on the very day of her flight, in the midst of her journey, she was seized. No house would shelter her, and she died on the roadside. This awful judgment so affected Craston that from that hour he became a changed man; a year or two afterwards he married a Puritan lady and became himself one of the most rigid of the sect. His uncle dying about the same time bequeathed

him a good estate, to which was entailed the condition that he should take the family name—*Franklin*. So Richard Craston became Sir Richard Franklin."

"Launcelot's father!" exclaimed Ethel.

"Yes. I had forgot to tell you that when he first loved your mother he was a widower with one child, a son who was christened Launcelot."

"And my father, what became of him?" asked Ethel.

"He entered some foreign army, leaving you to my adoption, after first exacting from me an oath that I would never acquaint you or any person with your parentage. From that vow he released me seven years ago."

"Then he is still living?"

"From that time I have never seen him or heard any news of him."

He had suppressed all but the barest outlines of the sad story, for little as was the emotion that showed upon her pale face he could perceive that it had greatly troubled her. He told her nothing of those doubts which had prompted her father to disown her, nor how after that last interview with him he had himself visited Sir Richard and wrung from him the true story of the flight with a solemn assurance not to be doubted of Lady Rhodes's purity. Herein, he also learned, lay the key of Blatherwick's influence; the minister had in some way discovered this and several other shameful secrets of Sir Richard's life, and held them as a terror over him to serve his own ends. Lady Franklin not having any children of her own, hated Launcelot with all the virulence of the pious. Ezekiel hated him equally, because he could feel the young man's clear intellect penetrated his foul hypocrisy. Although he never revealed to her her husband's secret he made common cause with her to keep Launcelot away from his home. It may be remembered by the reader, that on the occasion of Sir Richard's first and only visit to Woodhouse when his son lay wounded there, he had encountered Ethel in the hall. Her extraordinary resemblance to the unfortunate Lady Rhodes had greatly struck him. He afterwards made secret inquiries, discovered that a mystery hung over her birth, that her age was about the same as that of the infant daughter who had so strangely disappeared, and remembered that Wentworth and Sir Godfrey were great friends. These circumstances proved

nothing; but the barest suspicion of such a possibility as the likeness suggested was sufficient to make him regard Launcelot's love with horror. Thus it was he banished him from his home and played his wife's game without intending it.

After Lady Franklin's death, unable to longer endure the worse than priestly tyranny of Blatherwick, he rid himself of the incubus by the present of a large sum of money, that together with what he had made during the years he was keeper of the Franklins' consciences made up a goodly fortune, with which this shining light of the Gospel removed to London. Sir Richard was *in extremis* when his son, whom he had sent for from Germany, arrived, and was past, even if he had so desired, making any revelation. He left no document behind which could tell the story, and so Launcelot remained in ignorance of the fatal link which connected Ethel's family with his.

"And my father was living seven years ago and never desired to see me," said Ethel thoughtfully, after a long silence; "how he must have hated me!"

"He could not endure the sight of a child who so reminded him of the mother——"

"Then I am like her? Ah, that will account for his dislike. My poor father, what he must have suffered! I hope I may see him before he dies."

Wentworth made no reply.

"Come, dearest, it is growing late," he said presently; "and I fear me I have given you but a poor preparative for slumber."

She did not hear him; she was gazing into the dying embers of the fire, and he could see the tears trickling down her cheeks. He rose, and leaning against the great carved mantelpiece watched her for some minutes.

Dolefully the wind moaned without, rising at times to a fierce blast and then sinking into pitiful wails.

Still she remained in the same attitude, lost in thought.

"Come, darling," he said, touching her upon the shoulder.

Then she rose, and with deep sobs cast herself upon his bosom.

"You must not give way, sweetheart!" he said soothingly.

"I wish I had not told thee that sad story now ; it was the fear of distressing you that has so long kept my lips closed."

"It is not wholly that," she answered. "Before you even spoke of it there has been all day such a heavy weight at my heart ; this day too, that should have been all happiness. Every spot we have visited the question would come : Shall we ever again look upon this together ? and awfully distinct has always followed the answer, *Nevermore!* I can hear it now in the wind as it is eddying round the house," she cried, clinging yet closer to him.

The same strange forebodings had weighed down his own heart, and his imagination had given the same voice to the moaning blast. Yet he tried hard to dispel such gloomy fancies from her mind, but with little success. All night long he lay awake listening to the weird melancholy sound of the wind which seemed filled with mournful voices, as though the spirits of the dead Wentworths were chanting the funeral dirge of the living.

CHAPTER V.

EARL OF STRAFFORD.

WENTWORTH had not overrated his influence in the North. His indomitable energy, his passionate pleading, and above all that intense faith in the justice of his cause and in his own power infected nearly all with whom he came in contact, and everywhere procured him success.

"I have," he wrote to Charles, "so effectually, both in public and private, recommended the justice and necessity of the shipping business, and so clearly shown it to be not only for the honour of the kingdom in general, but for every man's especial safety, that I am now confident the assessment this next year will be cheerfully and universally answered within this jurisdiction."

The news of this marvellous success struck consternation into the ranks of his enemies.

"Charles," they said, "cannot refuse him anything after this."

Pym alone never doubted or faltered.

"It is but a little delay, at the worst," he would answer contemptuously; "let Charles make him earl, marquis, or duke, the fall will be the greater when it comes, as come it will."

His foes were right; it was impossible for Charles to any longer evade the poor favour of a title, so frequently bestowed upon men of no deserving, to one who had worked such

miracles in his cause. Thus upon his return to London the King declared his intention of conferring upon him the distinction of an earldom, and left to him the choice of the title by which he should be distinguished. The pleasure, however, Wentworth received from this boon was dashed with mortification at hearing that although his intercession had delayed the event several weeks, Sir Edward Coke had been dismissed from office and his secretaryship bestowed upon Sir Harry Vane.

"Her Majesty had set her heart upon it," said Charles, "and believe me Coke well merited his disgrace."

Wentworth made no reply, but these rebuffs made him feel how inimical was the Queen to his interests and how slight and easily diverted after all was the hold he had upon his royal master. But his haughty spirit would not tamely endure the triumph of so contemptible a foe as he esteemed Sir Harry Vane, and he determined to destroy his triumph by a blow he could not possibly anticipate. So that in addition to the title of *Strafford*, which was the name of the hundred in which his estates were situated, he requested that the patent should also entitle him *Baron of Raby*, which was a house belonging to Vane. The King, unaware of this last fact, ordered the patent to be so worded. Upon discovering the complication thus created he solicited Wentworth to resign the second title ; but upon this point he was inexorable, for where the humiliation of an enemy was concerned no consideration could turn him.

"If it be your Majesty's will to take back the honour you have bestowed upon me I shall not utter one murmur," he said, "but earl and baron must stand or fall together."

"If such be your decision," answered Charles in his most chilling tone, "I can urge you no further, as what is once given cannot be taken back ; but you will bring down upon yourself much enmity and rouse much ill blood by such an ill-advised resolution."

"While I enjoy your Majesty's favour I have no fear," replied the Earl.

The Queen, worked upon by Lady Carlisle, Hamilton, and Vane, was furious when she heard of this insult upon the man she had favoured ; it was not that she had so great a

liking for Vane, but her pride was stung by this opposition to her wishes and by the thought that the King should prefer any counsel to hers.

"The insolence of this man is unbearable," she said; "like Buckingham, he neglects no opportunity of showing how much he scorns me. You are but a puppet King that moves only by his will; you may wear the crown but he wields the sceptre."

"But it is in my service, sweetheart," replied the King, soothingly; "where have I a friend so devoted, a subject so tried, a genius so great as he?"

"You could find many such did you not overshadow all by the power of this man," she answered, impatiently.

And so she leagued herself more closely than ever with the enemies of the Earl to work his destruction—and her own.

Spite of all Strafford had accomplished the King's resources both in money and men were insufficient to carry on the war successfully against the compact force, all animated by the demon of fanaticism, which the Scotch had got together. Having done all that could be done in England, Strafford resolved to return to Ireland to levy reinforcements and subsidies. And thither, by his Majesty's permission, he went back early in 1640.

"And so ends all our great schemes," said Lady Carlisle bitterly, upon hearing of his departure, "and he has triumphed over us at all points. He has won the title he coveted, all his plans have prospered and he is more dominant than ever over the King's mind——"

"And he has increased the number of his enemies and advanced many paces nearer the block," interrupted Pym, calmly.

"The tree is not sown out of which Wentworth's block is to be made," replied the lady sarcastically.

"It is grown and felled and the axe is sharpened," answered Pym. "Ere another month the King will be obliged to have recourse to a Parliament; that will be the beginning of the end."

Again were his words prophetic. Scarcely had Strafford turned his back upon Whitehall ere the other ministers began to urge upon the King the necessity and advisability

of summoning a Parliament; they represented that by manifesting to the Commons a spirit of conciliation, and by offering at once and for ever to annul the odious impost of ship-money he would find them amenable, to all just demands.

And so a Parliament was summoned, and met on the 3rd of April. Pym demanded an inquiry into all the grievances of the last eleven years—that is to say of the whole time since the Commons last sat, before supply should be discussed. The prevailing tone of the House, however, was just and moderate. At the end of a month of deliberation which effected nothing, Hyde proposed that a vote should be taken upon the advisability of granting the King a supply, although not in the manner or in the proportion he desired. Amidst much clamour and opposition there seemed to be a chance of this resolution being carried, when Sir Harry Vane destroyed all by rising to assert that if the supply were not in the proportion and manner proposed in his Majesty's message it would not be accepted by him, and ended by desiring that the question might be laid aside.

After which he and Herbert, the Solicitor-General, who had seconded his assertion, hastened to the King, gave him a highly exaggerated account of the proceedings, suppressing all mention of the compromise offered and setting forth that it was the intention of the House to deprive him of all revenue. This report so exasperated Charles that the next morning he crowned his fatal blunders by a dissolution.

The conduct of Vane throughout the affair was that of deliberate treachery; he had no authority for the declaration he had made; and his subsequent conduct in the Long Parliament places this view beyond all doubt.

Charles, when the true story was reported to him, was greatly troubled; he declared he would have gladly accepted any supply, as it would have been an assurance that his subjects were disposed to assist him; he even thought of resummoning the members by proclamation, but such a course was found to be impossible. The treachery of Vane lost him the last chance of reconciliation with his subjects.

The violent faction rejoiced.

“Nothing could have better fallen out,” said Pym; “this

Parliament would never have done what was necessary to be done. The next will be of another calibre."

In less than three weeks, however, the King had raised above three hundred thousand pounds by voluntary loans, and with this supply began to carry on the war against the Scots with some show of vigour.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE CAMP.

HIS work in England accomplished, Strafford, as we must now call him, hurried back to Ireland. Within a fortnight he had raised a considerable subsidy and eight thousand troops. This done he again set sail for England.

At Chester he was seized with a severe illness ; but after a short delay, although still weak and suffering, he made his way by slow stages to London. The King, shocked at his condition, would fain have persuaded him to take a period of rest ; but of this he would not hear, and insisted upon immediately joining the army of the North.

"To be idle and know your Majesty was being served by lukewarm servants," he said, "would be more pain to me than all I can possibly endure in active service."

"The illness of my Lord of Northumberland, whom as you are aware I had appointed General of the Forces, will enable me to bestow that post upon you," said the King.

"By your Majesty's leave I should prefer to be named simply Lieutenant-General under the Earl, into whose hands I will deliver the supreme command upon his recovery."

"My faithful friend, ever ready to sacrifice everything to my interests," answered the King warmly ; "upon you alone can I rest in perfect trust ; all others seem wavering and doubtful ; those whom I have loaded with favours and to whom I have been all-confiding fall from me and join

with my enemies ; wherever I turn I encounter falsehood, treachery, and hate. What will be the end ! what will be the end ! ”

“ The overthrow of all your Majesty’s enemies, I trust,” answered Strafford ; but he could not command his voice to any cheerful ring, for doubt and despair were in his heart.

In the Earl of Northumberland’s absence Lord Conway, the General of Horse, was Commander-in-Chief. It was a choice which was generally approved as Conway had always been esteemed an excellent soldier, and had by his easy pleasant disposition steered clear of all enmity. But never was approbation more falsified.

Upon arriving within a short distance of Durham, where the army was then stationed, Strafford heard the disastrous news that the General of Horse had suffered himself to be defeated by the Scots at Newburn almost without striking a blow, and that the enemy had entered Newcastle. With about a hundred soldiers, leaving the rest to follow under his second in command with the best speed they were able, the Earl pressed forward and at nightfall arrived at Conway’s camp almost unattended, having outstripped all his attendants save two.

His name was sufficient password to the sentries ; as he galloped through the lines his quick eye detected everywhere laxity and demoralisation ; the guard was carelessly kept ; drunken soldiers staggered across his path ; oaths, bacchanalian songs, and the rattling of dice sounded on all sides. As he approached the General’s tent he heard bursts of laughter and the clink of glasses. The sentry placed without challenged him.

“ Your general, the Earl of Strafford,” he answered leaping from his horse. He dashed aside the soldier’s carbine ere he had time to recover, and tearing open the drapery that overhung the entrance of the tent, presented himself before the startled revellers.

There was a table covered with wine-bottles, jugs, goblets, glasses, and pools of liquor which had been spilled and was trickling upon the ground ; at the head, with his arm around a loosely-dressed bold-featured woman, sat a red-faced sensual-looking man, who was my Lord Conway ; and about him were grouped some seven or eight officers flushed

with drink, their dresses in disorder; there were two other women of a similar type to the first, one of whom was hugging the man sitting next to her, while the second, glass in hand, was just commencing a song, when this apparition burst upon the scene. The deep voice of the Earl loud with passion had risen above the clatter within, and that terrible name had reached Conway's ear as soon as the guard's. The rubicund tint of his face turned to ashy pallor; stupefied amazement, shame, and terror fell upon the countenances of his companions; the singer stopped with her glass midway between her mouth and the table, and her companions were too startled even to change their attitude until their admirers thrust them roughly aside.

The gaunt form worn by sickness, clothed in half armour and black; the dark fierce face framed by the jet-black dishevelled hair; the hollow cheeks flushed with rage and the dark glittering eyes that seemed to emit sparks of fire from beneath their cavernous pent-houses, invested him with something of supernatural terror and those who did not know his person, especially the women, were inclined to believe that the arch-fiend himself had broken in upon their revel.

For a moment there was profound motionless silence which was broken by the Earl's voice, but in that instant its tones had changed from passion to irony.

"I congratulate you, my Lord Conway," he said, doffing his hat, "upon your great victory and upon your knowing so well how to celebrate it; everywhere I hear the sounds of rejoicing; after hard fighting we must allow the soldier a little laxity; love and wine are the meed of the victors, but where are the laurels to crown their heads? What, are there no garlands for these mighty conquerors?"

All remained dumb, tongue-tied with shame and confusion. The women not understanding what it meant but full of trembling slunk away into the darkest corner of the tent, and watched and listened with open mouths and wide staring eyes.

"Why are you all who but a second ago were so loud and gleeful suddenly so silent?" he resumed in the same mocking voice; "why do these virgins who were doubtless about to celebrate in classic hymns the brave deeds of their warriors creep away so timidly? Come, let me hear this song of victory, let me rejoice with you over the rout of our foes!"

"I do not understand you, my lord," said Conway, stammering and vainly endeavouring to recover his presence of mind beneath this scathing sarcasm, which was far more terrible than the fiercest invectives.

"My meaning is plain enough; you have won a great victory and are celebrating it soldier-fashion. Is it not so?"

"You are mocking us," answered Conway, assuming an indignant tone.

"Indeed! Now it is my turn not to understand."

"You must be aware, my lord, that we have received a—check from the enemy's forces, but——"

"A check do you call it!" cried the Earl, all the torrent of his fury bursting forth at last. "Why, you were beaten like mangy hounds; fled from your foes like dogs before a whip."

"My lord, remember to whom you are speaking," cried Conway, laying his hand upon his sword.

The others, with angry exclamations rose to their feet and followed his example.

"Oh, you are wondrous brave, are you not, now you are eight to one? You add mutiny to your other virtues and dare to threaten your commander. Take your hands off your swords or I will have you shot where you stand."

Involuntarily every hand fell to its owner's side, for the command carried in that tone was resistless.

"And it is thus," he went on, "you mourn over your shame, in drunkenness and libidinousness when you should be bowed down and grovelling upon the earth in mortification. And these are the men to whom the King's safety is entrusted, the descendants of the soldiers who fought at Agincourt and Flodden, and of those who destroyed the power of Spain! Would to God I had died ere I had known the proud name of England so defiled!"

There was a noble anguish in those last utterances which penetrated even the wounded pride of the listeners, and brought their degradation more keenly home to them than they had yet felt it.

"To-morrow, sirs, you must render me up a strict account of all you have done and left undone. One of you show me to my quarters. And I would advise you to prepare your-

selves for the morning by throwing away your wine and dismissing your Phrynes."

When he had departed the officers regarded each other for several seconds in silent mortification. Then Conway sprang up, swept the table with his arm of every bottle and cup and turning to the wretched women who were still cowering in the corner, drove them out with blows and curses. His rage was furious.

"Though he should take my life for disobedience I will never serve under the command of this insolent tyrant!" he cried.

And all there solemnly pledged themselves to stand by him and obey no orders but his.

That the cowardice and treachery of this army well deserved all the opprobrium that Strafford had heaped upon its officers is indisputable; but this ebullition of passion was impolitic, more especially before he had investigated the case, learned upon whom the blame should fall and singled out those, of which there were several, who had striven to perform their duty.

The consequences of his rashness were soon apparent. That very night while overcome by fatigue and sickness he was lying in deep slumber, Conway and his associates went round the tents of the soldiers and inflamed their minds by repeating, with many additions, the epithets which the new commander had applied to their defeat, and they also swore to obey no orders but those of my Lord Conway.

When the next morning the Earl summoned a council in his tent, in order to investigate into the causes of the late defeat, few attended, and those who came evinced a surly and mutinous spirit; the aspect of the common soldiers was equally if not more threatening.

"The causes of your defeat are beyond all comprehension," he said; "you expected the attack, you were drawn up ready to receive it, the enemy were obliged to ford a deep river and march up a steep hill before they could reach your lines; you could have decimated them ere they came within thrust of your pikes, instead of which, that I should ever live to say so of Englishmen, you fled before these scurvy Scotch traitors."

"Our consciences made us cowards," replied one boldly; "had it been in a righteous cause we should not have been found wanting."

"We could not raise our hand against men who were fighting for their consciences," answered a second, "and against those tyrant priests and ministers who would destroy all liberty."

"Obedience and courage are the only virtues that can be granted to a soldier," answered Strafford sternly; "he has nought to do with the righteousness or unrighteousness of causes; it is for him to do and not to think."

But the Earl knew that to face the enemy with such troops as these would be to encounter certain defeat, and so with a heart full of bitterness, he ordered a retreat to be made into Yorkshire; thus leaving the whole of Northumberland and Durham in the hands of the Scotch.

It was now that those secret machinations, that undermining of loyalty in the minds of the people which Pym and his confederates had been carrying on so many years, yielded their harvest. The militia and train-bands of the counties alone could have repelled this invasion without the aid of a single trooper; but so great was the disaffection spread by those secret influences, that no man moved to drive back the rebels, and the hands that should have been grasping swords were signing petitions of grievances.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GREAT COUNCIL OF PEERS.

AMONG other expedients urged upon the King was one that had not been resorted to for several centuries ; this was to summon a Council of the Great Peers. And not knowing what to do for the best, to this he finally assented. Notices were issued to the nobles to meet his Majesty within twenty days at York.

Thither in gloom and dejection came Strafford. Ethel, who had been residing in that city for some weeks, was there to meet him. She was struck with dismay at the alteration that had taken place in him within the little time that had elapsed since they had parted. But beyond her anxiety for his health was another and more immediate one—anxiety for his safety. For since her stay at York she had begun to understand for the first time the terrible danger in which he stood from popular and universal hatred. It was a great shock to her ; for she could not realise the idea of hatred against him whom her imagination had exalted as the noblest and best of created beings. It seemed to her that some monstrous hallucination must possess men's minds.

It was many a day since the ancient imperial city had witnessed so imposing an assemblage gathered within its walls upon so imposing an occasion. It was a momentary revival of one of the grandest forms of feudalism—the great Council of the Barons which had so frequently checked the overweening power of the Sovereign and guarded the liberties of the country.

The great hall of the castle was already crowded when Strafford entered; every face was turned upon him and there was scarcely one, save that of Laud, which did not frown with more or less of hatred. Calm and self-possessed he took his seat beside the Archbishop who held out his hand with a friendly greeting.

Strafford had arrived at York on the previous evening, but had not yet been able to obtain an interview with the King who had been there some days, from which he augured that Charles was about to commit some act of which he knew his minister would disapprove, and was desirous of avoiding all discussion. Thus, when his Majesty rose to address the august assembly he listened with great anxiety for his words. His worst fears were very quickly confirmed. For the King at once proceeded to announce his intention of summoning a Parliament, which should meet with all possible despatch.

"And to this course," he said, "we have been counselled by our well-beloved Queen, than whom no one is more anxious to heal the wounds of this distracted kingdom."

A murmur of applause ran through the hall. Strafford and Laud exchanged glances.

After this declaration there was truly nothing more to be said, as the discussion of all affairs would now have to be left to the Parliament. Thus it caused a movement of astonishment from all, except those in the secret, when my Lord Holland rose and "humbly prayed" that his Majesty would be pleased to at once institute an inquiry into the recent arrogant and unwarrantable conduct of the Earl of Strafford to my Lord Conway, in whose person, as being his representative and chief officer, his Majesty himself had been insulted.

"Had not my Lord Conway been the most loyal of subjects," he went on, "and being imbued with a most wholesome reverence for the laws, preferring even the sully of his own honour to doing displeasure to your Majesty and your ordinances, he might have sought a bloody revenge for his insulted pride; but as it is he bows humbly to your royal will in the full assurance you will do him right."

Every eye was turned upon the Earl, who had risen at the first mention of his name and stood with his gaze fixed upon the speaker.

"What does this mean? This is not a place nor time for such subjects," said the King irritably; "if my Lord Strafford has given offence to my Lord Conway he will doubtless make amends, but this is a private matter."

"Pardon me, your Majesty, but your General of the Horse was insulted before all his officers," urged Holland persistently, "and the insolence of my Lord Strafford to all men has risen to such a pass that it can no longer be endured."

"It has!" rung through the hall, the cry rising almost to an angry shout.

The colour of the King came and went, and his agitation was evident as he looked down from his dais upon those scores of angry faces all turned upon the one man, who alone stood self-possessed and rigid as the marble image of some Titan upon a storm-beaten shore.

Charles cast an appealing glance towards him as he said: "Have you any answer to make to this, my lord?"

"Only that I am struck with wonder that the shamelessness and audacity of man can go beyond all that even *I* have conceived of it." His deep voice, although the anger of it was smothered, rolled through the hall like the muttering of thunder. "The General," he went on, glancing at Holland, "who made so notable a retreat at Dunse at the first sight of an inferior enemy is well fitted to champion the cause of the officer who fled before a shower of Scotch bullets and abandoned two English counties to the invaders without striking a blow. I arrived in the camp the night after this infamous flight and found my Lord General of the Horse and his brave officers celebrating their disgrace in the company of courtesans and in high feast and rejoicing. Sickened by such a sight I spoke from my heart all my heart felt, and were all your swords now pointed at my throat I would not retract one word."

A few there had the grace to look ashamed of their advocacy.

"Can this be true?" demanded the King sternly.

"So please your Majesty," answered Holland, trembling with passion at the home-thrust he had received, "the truth is so tricked out with falsehood as to conceal it altogether. My Lord Conway and his officers were at supper when the Earl burst in upon them, as he might upon the drunken

revels of common troopers, and ere they could utter a word maltreated them with such imperious language as he might scarcely use to his lackeys."

Never yet had Charles been placed in so embarrassing a position, both his sympathies and sense of right were wholly with the Earl, whose truth it was impossible to doubt; and with him he was equally incensed at the dastardly conduct of his General, but he had not the greatness of soul to rise above the terrible opposition which confronted him; had he been so gifted he would have awed it down and won respect for his firmness. But Charles never dared in the face of a difficulty—he always temporised.

Standing near the throne chair were Hamilton and Argyle, both deadly enemies of the Earl's; they too were eager to have a thrust at him.

"If it please your Majesty," said Argyle, acting as spokesman for both, "we think it but justice that the conduct of the Earl of Strafford upon this and other like occasions should be investigated, and that until he has cleared himself of this and similar charges he shall be suspended from all command in the army."

"And confer it upon the Marquis of Hamilton," replied Strafford ironically, "who lately displayed so much zeal and vigour in your Majesty's cause when he sat down before Leith and hobbled and nobbed with the inhabitants, and paid friendly visits with his lady-mother to her Covenanting friends; or add it as another favour to the many with which your Majesty has laden the Earl of Argyle that he may *sell* it to the rebels."

"Sell! Dare you apply such a word to me?" cried Argyle, his face flushing crimson.

"My lord, you forget yourself!" exclaimed the King, startled and indignant at such a charge.

"I speak upon assured grounds, your Majesty," answered the Earl calmly. "Within this hour proofs have been placed in my hands that that man, to whom you have been so bountiful, whom you have so loved and trusted, has signed the Covenant and pledged himself to aid the rebels with all the forces he can raise."

This time he had launched a thunderbolt that struck all dumb with consternation, for an exposure so terrible was dangerous alike to all.

From crimson Argyle's face turned to deathly pallor; he could only gasp out: "It is false!" and clutch at the pillar against which he stood to save himself from falling.

"Behold, your Majesty!" continued Strafford mercilessly, and pointing to the convicted traitor, "behold the verification of his father's prophecy—that father who, for his disobedience, would have left him a penniless title had not your Majesty interposed your royal prerogative. I have often heard that prophecy repeated by my Lord Marquis of Hamilton who is now so much my Lord Argyle's friend. As it was spoken to your Majesty you will know whether he reports it aright. These were the words, as I remember: 'You have brought me low that you may raise him, which I doubt you will live to repent, for he is a man of craft, subtlety, and falsehood, and can love no man; and if ever he finds it in his power to do you a mischief, be sure he will do it!'"

"Can this charge be true?" exclaimed the King, pale and agitated.

"It is not true, your Majesty, as I will prove to you ere the day is out," replied Argyle, assuming a bravado which, however, was too transparent to deceive even a less shrewd observer than Charles.

"Of that your Majesty will best judge when it pleases you to command that I shall produce my proofs," replied Strafford.

"We dissolve this assembly and will hold council with our ministers three hours from now," said the King, rising to terminate a scene which might otherwise have proceeded to yet more embarrassing incidents.

The announcement was a relief to all; the unexpected turn of events, so unforeseen by any there, had so completely overthrown previous calculations that every man required time to pause and think ere he again trusted his tongue to speak. And so his Majesty having departed the nobles broke up into knots, and as they slowly quitted the hall spoke together in low and earnest tones.

Strafford and Laud walked side by side in silence, the former still calm and dignified with no sign upon his front of the battle he had passed through; the latter pale and trembling, a mark of derision to his foes.

"Courage, courage!" whispered the Earl, pressing his companion's hand.

"We are lost!" groaned the Archbishop.

"They have not attacked you."

"But they will."

"Whatever may come, let us meet it with courage and not give our enemies a double victory," said Strafford sternly.

His triumph was complete and magnificent; he had turned the weapons of his foes against themselves and overwhelmed them with dismay and humiliation when they hoped to crush him. But it was his last victory, and he felt it was so. The odds were too great against him.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE KING'S PLEDGE.

ERE he arrived home the news of this stormy scene had preceded him, for Ethel had placed among his attendants an old and trusty servant whom she had instructed to faithfully report to her all that passed.

So he found her upon his return greatly dismayed and full of entreaties.

"There is nothing to fear," he said soothingly. "His Majesty will protect me against all their worst malice can do."

"It is a rotten reed to lean upon," she answered earnestly; "for how often has he not thwarted you, failed you, and given the preference to your enemies?"

"Hush, dearest!" he replied reprovingly. "I cannot listen to such words, even from your lips."

But the danger which she felt with all a woman's instinct when her beloved is threatened, rendered her heedless of reproof.

"Oh my dear lord," she went on with increasing earnestness, "remember it is not of yourself only you have to think; you are a husband, the father of three dear children and of another that has not yet seen the light. Kneel, kneel, my darlings!" she cried, turning to the children who were present, "join your prayers to mine. I implore you not for my sake alone but for the sake of these and for my unborn babe to resign your offices ere it be too late!"

The sight of those four kneeling figures with their up-

turned tearful faces melted him, and his eyes glistened and his voice was muffled as he raised them, folding his wife and his boy in his arms while the girls clung round him sobbing.

"You have conquered, darling," he whispered.

In a moment Ethel's face was radiant with sunshine. "Dear husband, how can I thank you and show you the gratitude of my heart?" she murmured.

In the midst of the scene there arrived a messenger from the King requesting the immediate presence of the Earl in private.

"Nothing could have fallen out more fortunately," cried Ethel in great joy, "for now you can execute your resolve before it has time to cool."

Strafford found Charles in such a state of perturbation as he had never witnessed in him before.

"I have sent for you, my lord," he said, "that you may explain the charges made against you before the Council meet, in order that I may be in a better position to judge of them."

His tone and looks were cold and displeased.

Strafford gave the explanation in much the same words he had used before the peers, but with more particulars.

The King listened with a discontented countenance, and when the Earl had finished answered irritably :

"I had fondly hoped that to-day, at least, would have been one of general satisfaction ; that my proclamation of a Parliament would have given me one day of peace. My lord, you have been over-zealous in this matter ; we do not for a moment doubt you were prompted by care for our interests, but restraint and circumspection are required on such occasions, and we fear that you create many enmities against us both by not paying due regard to such necessities."

"I am grieved, your Majesty, that you should view my conduct in such a light," answered the Earl with respectful dignity ; "but at the same time it renders me bolder to solicit your Majesty to relieve me of those great offices and honours you were pleased to bestow upon me in your love and bounty, and to pray that you will give me your gracious leave to retire to my own estate, there to seek that repose which my health so much needs."

Wonder and consternation broke out upon the King's features on hearing this speech.

"Surely, Strafford," he cried, "I do not understand you aright! You would not desert your King in the hour of his need for a few hasty words."

"My determination has naught to do with anything that has now passed, your Majesty; I came hither with the prayer upon my lip. Could my counsel and help be any longer of value to you I would not shrink from my responsibilities while I have life. But I feel that my foes are hemming me in on all sides, that they are stronger than I, and will ultimately conquer."

"Such fears are groundless," answered Charles earnestly; "they cannot injure you; they may bay but they shall never bite, for *I pledge you our royal word that while there is a King in England not a hair of your head shall be touched.*"

"God bless your Majesty for so noble an assurance," answered the Earl, much moved; "but still it were better you should never be called upon to redeem it, for your defence of me will bring down much trouble and hatred upon your own head."

"That is a contingency of which we are the fittest judge," answered the King with some asperity. "In the meanwhile, my lord, you will continue your present employments without further remonstrance."

The Earl could only bow in silent acquiescence. And so ended this interview in which Charles sealed the doom of his great minister.

Ere the Council sat Strafford's foes had advised together and resolved that all further measures against him should be suspended until the assembling of Parliament. Consequently much to the satisfaction of the King Lord Holland begged leave to withdraw the charge he had made against the Earl of Strafford *for the present*. It need scarcely be added that the permission was very emphatically granted. This being decided there was considered a petition of the Scotch, worded in the most humble terms and praying that the King would grant a commission to inquire into their grievances. After some debate the petition was granted and the commissioners named.

The next morning the lords appointed, among whom were

some of Strafford's bitterest enemies, departed for Ripon where the delegates from the insurgents awaited them.

These delegates again set forth in the most plausible terms their great love for the person of his Majesty to which access had been denied them by the power of their enemies ; they also declared that their invasion was for the good of Englishmen, since it gave them an opportunity to vindicate their own liberties and laws threatened by certain evil men who desired to establish the same slavery in England as they had brought upon the two other kingdoms. Which would be prevented by their removal from about the King, whose own gracious disposition would provide for the happiness of all his dominions if those ill men could not influence his councils.

When the lords returned to York they described in most eloquent terms the wonderful devotion and loyalty evinced by the Scotch to the King's person ; and one, as the mouth-piece of the delegates, actually laid before Charles the extraordinary proposition that there should be a cessation of hostilities while the grievances of the insurgents were being heard ; and that in order to preserve peace and law his Majesty should undertake to support the rebel army at the cost of fifty thousand per month. It was further prayed that the hearing of this cause should be removed to London.

Strafford was present when these propositions were made, and his indignation broke all bounds.

"Within a few days," he said, appealing to the King, "your Majesty's reinforcements will have arrived from Ireland. With those I will undertake on the forfeit of my life to sweep England so clear of these canting rogues that they shall not leave one vestige of their presence behind."

After this speech the debate grew so fierce that the King was compelled to adjourn the council.

The next day, unknown to Strafford, he gave secret instructions that all the demands of the insurgents should be complied with, the maintenance of their army guaranteed and the further hearing of their grievances removed to London. All dignity, courage, and judgment had deserted him in this crisis, or he could never have consented to so fatal and infamous a policy as to pay tribute to an

invading army of his rebellious subjects, and to suffer them, nay invite them to traverse the whole country, sowing in a soil only too ready to receive them the seeds of rebellion wherever they went. To parallel anything so imbecile and dastardly it is necessary to go back to the reign of John.

When Strafford, who remained behind in command of the troops, heard the news, which he did not until the King had departed for London, his heart wholly failed him.

"All is lost," he said; "henceforth the fight is one of desperation; it can only delay but cannot avert the inevitable destruction."

Only once again on earth were he and his faithless master destined to meet.

CHAPTER IX.

PRONOUNCING DOOM.

A FEW days before the Parliament met there was a secret meeting of the extreme party at the old house in Tothill Fields. All the great leaders were there : Pym, Hampden, Hollis, Martyn, Hazelrig, Savile, and many others of less note, among them Launcelot Franklin, who had been elected one of the Knights of the Shire for York. The one all-absorbing subject was the proposed impeachment of Strafford and Laud.

"Until they are removed from the King's councils all talk concerning redress of grievances is mere waste of breath," said Pym. "The temporal tyrant first, then the spiritual."

"And when they are removed what is to be their punishment?" demanded one of the members.

"The scaffold!" answered Savile and Martyn in a breath.

There was a pause at this declaration ; many were evidently unprepared for so extreme a measure.

Hollis was the first to speak.

"It will be a better punishment to so proud a man," he said, "to be impeached, and to lose all his great employments, if we add to these a sentence of perpetual banishment."

"Banishment!" broke in Savile impetuously. "When once this tiger who has so long held these kingdoms in

abject terror is known to be in the toils, there will rise such a cry for his blood that neither King nor Commons shall dare resist."

"To condemn to death so great a nobleman at the popular clamour is a dangerous precedent," urged Hollis.

"Mr. Denzil Hollis, with all his boasted patriotism, cannot forget he is the brother of the Earl of Clare," answered Henry Martyn bitterly.

"It is but natural Mr. Hollis should have some feeling for one who was once, and whose children are still so closely allied to him," observed Hampden.

"That consideration does not bias me one feather's weight," replied Hollis proudly. "So profound is my conviction that the Earl of Strafford is an enemy to his country—and the welfare of that I vow to God is my first consideration—that were he my own brother by blood I would not spare him. Nor will I oppose the deliberate judgment of the House, whatever it may be; but I dislike this prejudice which robs our proceedings of that strict impartiality and justice which ought above all to characterise them."

"Mr. Denzil Hollis speaks justly," said Launcelot rising; "to prejudice my Lord Strafford is but to follow in the footsteps of that arbitrary power we are pledged to put down. He has wrought many evils, worst of all he has crushed all liberty; but we cannot deny him a certain nobleness of mind and many private virtues the memory of which should temper our harshness."

"We have naught to do with private virtues," interrupted Martyn roughly.

"As we are all agreed upon the impeachment," broke in Pym, who had been attentively listening to all that passed and was anxious to avoid further discussion, "would it not be wiser to arrange the preliminaries before pronouncing the judgment?"

So sensible a proposition had the desired effect, and diverted the discussion into another channel.

When the meeting broke up Pym hastened to Lady Carlisle's, and told her exultingly of all that had passed. He expected that she would greet his news with satisfaction equal to his own. He was surprised, then, to find she listened in silence and with a countenance rather sad than joyful.

"How is this?" he exclaimed. "I thought I was the bearer of welcome news!"

"At the first sound of the word impeachment the King will dissolve the Parliament," she answered, evading his query. "He has done so before for half such audacity."

"Ay, eleven years ago; but the Commons have been growing since then, organising their forces. Then the people dared only growl; now they dare to act. Scotland is in rebellion and brave John Hampden has raised the flag of resistance in England. The next Parliament that meets at Westminster will not be easily dissolved; before its work is done England will be so changed that few men will recognise it. Such a storm is gathering over this land—east, west, north, and south—the like of which has no record in our history. When it bursts Charles Stuart will abandon his minister to save himself."

"I cannot believe it," she replied irritably.

"One might imagine you did not wish to believe it," he answered.

Now that the object for which she had so long striven and yearned was brought within her grasp, her heart began to fail.

"Oh, if it were not for *her*," she murmured, when she was alone, "I would save him even yet!"

CHAPTER X.

AN OLD FRIEND.

LAUNCELOT left some little time before the meeting broke up, and took his way in a thoughtful mood towards London.

When, nine years before, he left England, he passed over to the Continent. The terrible thirty years' war was then in its height and all Europe was one great camp. He had left his native country without any settled plan or even intentions; he had but one thought—to get far away from the scene of his ruined hopes, as though in his flight he might leave behind something of his troubles. Cast into the midst of that war fever it was impossible for him in the then condition of his mind to escape infection. He had long been an ardent admirer of the great Protestant champion, the brave Gustavus Adolphus, and in a very little time he made up his mind to enlist beneath his banner.

For seven years he fought in the Swedish service, first as a common soldier and then as an officer; his reckless bravery and high talent gained him quick promotion; and had he chosen he might have risen to a commanding rank. But ambition was dead within him. An outcast from his home, the one great all-absorbing passion of his life blighted, a solitary unloved man—what were renown and honours to him? And so he declined all that were offered. He had not misjudged his heart when he declared that no lapse of time could change it. Years could not fade his love, or that

ideal which was for ever lost to him ! but after awhile the restlessness, the poignant regrets of passion, subsided into a calm yet intense worship such as he would have felt for her had she died. And was she not dead to him ? A soldier's life had given a strength to his character which it had before lacked. He was still a dreamer, a theorist, an enthusiast, but he was also an actor. The intense love of liberty which had grown out of his classic studies, and of those Utopian visions of human happiness which had been superadded by his imagination, had received a new impulse in the camp of Gustavus Adolphus, among whose soldiers, gathered from all nations and all creeds save the Catholic, were to be found the wildest and strangest theories of freedom and government.

Upon returning to England he once more arrayed himself with that extreme party of which Henry Martyn was the type, with those men who looked forward, not so much to limiting the monarchical power as to subverting it and raising a republic upon the ruins. But he was no longer content with inert advocacy and mere moral support ; he now desired to take an active part in the great work, and to its accomplishment he resolved to devote his every thought and energy, his fortune, and his life. As soon as the writs were issued for the new Parliament he put himself in nomination for the western division of Yorkshire ; being known as the son of a staunch supporter of the country party he was returned by a considerable majority, and was prepared to range himself with what would be termed in modern parlance the Extreme Left.

The process against Strafford, however, was to him a subject of much anxious thought. Had no personal feeling intervened he would have voted for his death with the dispassionate patriotism of a Brutus. But beside the doomed man stood the image of the widowed Ethel, whom his voice would thus help to plunge into the deepest misery. He shuddered at the thought ; and she would she not believe he had been actuated to this course by malice ? And, indeed, how could he even assure himself that such a sentiment did not warp his judgment ? Apart from political considerations, Strafford as the husband of the woman he still so devotedly loved had acquired a deep interest in his mind, for her happiness was bound up in

his and he felt grateful to him for the tender affection with which, as all the world knew, he had treated her in their married life. There could be no greater proof than this of the noble purity of Launcelot's sentiments; to have possessed her love would have been to him perfect felicity beyond which all else was worthless; but there was a comfort to his desolation in knowing that she was happy, even though it was in the arms of another. That cry for death had given him a great shock. Perpetual exile was the utmost punishment he had thought would be inflicted upon the great minister; and in the tranquillity of an obscure life, though she may at times grieve for the old scenes, he knew that Ethel could still find contentment and the cultivated mind of her husband resignation. But that cry had rudely awakened him from this dream and revealed how unlikely it was that the minister's enemies would be content with so light a vengeance, or indeed with anything short of death.

Musing thus he crossed the fields and entered Tothill Street. There was situated in this thoroughfare at the time of which we write, and even until a recent period, an ancient hostelry, called The Cock; as he drew near this tavern Launcelot's attention was attracted by the clashing of swords and other sounds of a brawl. With a soldier's instinct he pressed forward and entered the great yard, and by the light of a couple of torches stuck against the walls saw a crowd of some dozen people, and three men engaged at cut-and-thrust, two attacking the third; as he came upon the scene the red smoky light fell upon the face of the latter and revealed to him the well-remembered features of his old friend Godfrey Hornby. In an instant he had drawn his sword, and ranging himself at Hornby's side laid on with such vigour that the two fellows quickly took to their heels, and rushing into the street were in a moment lost in the darkness.

So rapidly had all this taken place, that Hornby could hardly understand the cause of their flight, until he turned round and saw a man with a naked weapon in his hand standing beside him.

"Hast thou forgotten me, old friend?" cried Launcelot, extending his hand.

"Good God! is it you?" muttered Hornby falling back, seemingly disconcerted at the recognition.

The ostlers, tapsters, and others who had gathered about the combatants—it had been a drunken quarrel over cards, the two fellows that fled being sharpers whom Hornby had caught in the act of cheating him—these people seeing a person of Launcelot's appearance interfere quickly dispersed.

"This is a strange meeting," pursued Launcelot, scarcely observing the embarrassment of his manner; "why I have been seeking thee half over Europe. But come, we must have a bottle and a talk together."

And he took him by the arm and led him into the great travellers' room where they took their seats apart from the company, at the farther end.

Since their last meeting Hornby had greatly changed for the worse; long straggling unkempt gray hair, blotched face, red swollen nose, fishy eyes, ragged dress, and a general look of dirt and squalor told of excesses and poverty.

Hornby caught his sorrowful glance; the fight and this unlooked-for encounter had sobered him.

"I am not improved, am I?" he cried with a short reckless laugh. "I am a vagabond trooper out of work, waiting for the next levy of cutthroats. I offered myself to the Scotch; not that I should have cared about fighting for them, but I couldn't sing psalms so they would none of me. But there will be work anon in merry England; in the meantime I live on hope."

"I also have been a soldier since we last met," answered Launcelot, "and fought under the noble Duke of Saxe Weimar until his death, two years ago."

"And I under Bannier, until I was left behind wounded in Bohemia; so we have been in the same service."

There was a hard indifference in Hornby's manner so different to the old rough affection that Launcelot could not understand it. His mysterious disappearance and his strange letter had ever since been a subject of wondering speculation to Franklin. Among his many surmises he had once approached very near to a portion of the truth; but it appeared so incredible that he could not entertain it. Now they had met again, however, he determined to solve a mystery which had much disturbed him. After a time, under the influence of a bottle of generous Burgundy, Hornby softened a little more into his old self and Launcelot gradually led the conversation towards the subject.

Hornby evaded it at first and tried hard to divert their talk into another direction ; but Franklin held on to his point, upon which his companion fell into a fit of silent meditation which lasted for some time, and which the other made no attempt to interrupt.

"Since you will have it explained, be it so," said Hornby at length ; "but, mark me, you will repent your curiosity, for it touches you nearly ; it is only for your own sake I have held it back. I tell you, Launcelot Franklin," he cried with a sudden fierceness, "I would have as soon met the devil himself as you this night. You shall know all the reason I have to curse your name, and then we must be strangers to one another evermore."

He had already, as the reader is aware, years ago acquainted Launcelot with the ruin of his married life ; he now told him of the child, of whom he had previously suppressed all mention, that he had confided to Wentworth ; of his doubt concerning its birth, and finally the revelation made to him by Pym on the very night he was about to claim her at Lady Carlisle's house.

For minutes afterwards Launcelot sat like one dazed, stunned, until it even melted Hornby to look upon his white face and he said :

"It is not that I hold you accountable for your father's sins, but my heart revolts against all kin of his."

"God ! can this be true ?" murmured Launcelot shuddering.

"It is, every word," replied Hornby doggedly.

All the guests, save two, who sat over the fire at the farther end of the long room deep in converse with their backs towards our friends, had departed, so that there were no witnesses of the scene.

"But might there not be some mistake—a coincidence of names often deceives," cried Launcelot despairingly.

"No ; I tell you it is beyond all doubt," replied Hornby.

"Does my Lord Strafford know of this ?"

"He does."

"But he does not believe that Ethel——"

He stopped, for he could not put the thought into words.

"So he always professed," answered Hornby divining

the unspoken question. "I have no doubt but that he saw your father and extracted the truth from him; such, I believe, was his intention, and at times I have thought of writing to him to know this."

"And why have you not done so?"

"Because I am weary of the wretched business. What would it avail me to know the truth now? My child has grown up a stranger not knowing me; and do you think my Lady Countess would now acknowledge a battered hireling ready to enlist under any king or any nation and cut throats at so much a day? Truly a noble father for the wife of the great Earl of Strafford! Could anything I might now learn give me back the past, raise this ragged rascalion to the fortune he once held? I never pray but for one thing, and that is that I may meet at last a soldier's death and not die in a gutter, or in some such drunken brawl as you interrupted to-night."

"I trust not," said Launcelot sadly.

To have offered consolation, assistance, or to have even spoken of hope would have sounded as an insult from his lips; but to have restored this deeply-wronged man to his once high position, and, above all to have given him oblivion for the past, the generous young man would at that moment have laid fortune, life itself at his feet—ay, even have changed places with him. And yet with all this burden of transmitted sin upon his soul he dared do nothing.

There was silence for some minutes. Hornby had finished the first bottle of wine and called for a second, which he was now rapidly emptying in a sullen dogged manner. Launcelot was deep in thought. He had already formed a resolution. It was to seek Strafford and hear from his lips the confirmation or denial of Hornby's story. He cannot deny me such an explanation, was his reflection.

He mentioned his purpose to his companion, and asked him to bear him company.

"That my Lady Countess may send me into the kitchen to dine with her scullions," he replied with a sneer. "Not I."

"Ethel is incapable of false pride," answered Launcelot, "and would treat you as becomes a daughter under any circumstances."

"Bah!" retorted Hornby contemptuously, swallowing a cup of wine at a draught.

"Let me know where I shall find you then when I return, for you would surely like to know?"

"I want to know nothing," interrupted Hornby fiercely. "I know all, much more than I wish to know. But I want never to look upon your face again. I spared your father for your sake, let that be enough forbearance ; do not seek more. Begone !"

The bloodshot eyes, the purple face, the muffled voice and the drunken fury of his manner told Launcelot how useless it was to argue further with him.

So without another word he rose. As he was leaving the room Hornby called out :

"You'll hear of me here, if I'm not under the turf. Now go !"

Having discharged the score, Launcelot departed with a heavy heart.

"This is my father's work," was his thought.

CHAPTER XL

HONOUR FOR HONOUR.

EARLY on the morning of the following day Launcelot set forward on his journey to York. Everywhere through the country he passed he heard mutterings of the coming storm ; everywhere he found anxiety and agitation. Business was almost suspended. Every man's mind was engrossed by politics to the exclusion of his own affairs ; and in the towns the shops were left to take care of themselves while their owners discussed the probable action of the new Parliament. Although the design of the impeachment had been kept a profound secret, there was a general belief that one of the first acts of the Commons would be some violent measure against Strafford and Laud.

The hatred against the spiritual minister far exceeded that testified against the temporal. There were few redeeming points in the character of the Archbishop. His intolerance assumed the worst form of bigotry and his vindictiveness descended to the most petty and despicable acts. He would mark a man out for vengeance for the lightest word or the most unmeaning jest ; while his attempt to impose Popish ceremonies upon the forms of the Established Church completed the odium in which he was held by all classes. To the hatred expressed so universally against this haughty prelate Launcelot heard scarcely a dissentient voice. With regard to Strafford the case was different. There were many ready to do justice to his virtues ; to acknowledge his strict

integrity, his impartial justice, his unselfish devotion to the King, even while they strongly condemned his administration. But Launcelot could hear that nearly all his reprehensible acts had been greatly misrepresented and exaggerated, and that much of the hatred against him had been rather instilled into men's minds than arisen from their own unbiassed convictions. All, however, were equally embittered against the cold haughty arrogance he assumed in public, so repellent to English feelings and indeed the worst offence of which a sovereign or statesman can be guilty in this country, where *bonhomie* and good-natured familiarity will neutralise both vice and tyranny as they did in the persons of Henry the Eighth and Elizabeth. Every one appeared to be confident that the new House of Commons would compel the deposition both of the minister and the Archbishop. Some of the more violent contended that both must be sentenced to perpetual banishment; but the idea of putting them to death did not seem to have entered any man's brain; at least, such was the impression which his observations during the journey left upon Launcelot. And this conclusion increased his distaste, even upon political grounds, for an act which he had not regarded favourably upon its proposition, and confirmed what he had from the first believed that the Earl's death was demanded rather by the private malice of a clique than by the voice of the nation.

He travelled with post-horses and with all possible speed, for he had only seven days from the time of his starting to the assembling of the Parliament, which opened on the 3rd of November and at which he was determined to be present.

He arrived at York on the evening of the 31st of October. A sullen gloom reigned throughout the city—a treacherous calm, even more boding than the clamour and agitation he had left behind. Strafford was still sufficiently potent there to suppress all open murmurings against his authority, but every face was “the index to a tragic volume.”

Having put up at an hostelry, refreshed himself and changed his attire, Launcelot made his way to the castle, where the Earl was then residing. It was long since he had felt such tremors as at the thought of this approaching interview. He found the castle guarded with as much care

and by as strong a force as though an enemy had been without the walls. The soldiers on duty were entirely composed of the Irish troops, who had recently arrived, and upon whose fidelity Strafford could better rely than upon that of the English forces.

Launcelot found considerable difficulty in passing the sentries, and would certainly not have gained admittance that night had he not been observed by one of the old Woodhouse domestics, who knew him well, and undertook to let his lord know that Sir Launcelot Franklin desired speech with him on business of importance.

After a delay of some ten minutes a personal attendant of the Earl's appeared, who conducted him to an antechamber and left him. A few minutes afterwards the door opened and Strafford entered. Launcelot was quite startled by the alteration which care and sickness had wrought in him since they last met. His greeting was dignified, yet neither cold nor cordial.

"It is many years since you and I have met, Sir Launcelot," he said; and there was a shade of sadness in his voice and face, for this visit recalled so many sweet and bitter memories of the past.

Launcelot was touched by the melancholy of that tone, for this meeting brought back to him also a host of remembrances full of tenderness and sorrow. "Many changes have come to both of us since then," he replied, uttering his thought.

"Ay," answered Strafford. "But I understand you have business with me," he added, after a pause.

The question called back Launcelot's wandering thoughts to the object of his journey, into which he at once plunged without preface or observation. "Three days ago I met, after many years, a man whom I had until then known as Godfrey Hornby, but whose real name it appears is Sir Godfrey Rhodes; he told me a story of which I was before ignorant—I perceive you understand me and that I need not enter into particulars."

"And did not Sir Richard, even upon his deathbed, make you acquainted with this——" He paused for want of a suitable word.

"When I arrived at the hall he was already speechless," replied Launcelot, taking up the break.

"And did he leave no confession behind among his papers?"

"None that I have ever discovered."

"As you have heard this story, what would you of me?" demanded Strafford coldly.

"As you must be aware, Hornby is himself ignorant of many of the most important particulars, even of the extent of my father's guilt. I could not rest with a doubt lingering in my mind. I would know the worst or the best of my misery."

Strafford regarded him steadfastly while he spoke. "*Your* misery!" he answered; "these things cannot affect you. Not upon *his own* progeny could fall the effects of your father's evil deed."

"Would to Heaven they could!" replied Launcelot fervently. "Would I could have taken the burden of misery which his crime has laid upon others! I at least share it with them now."

Strafford's face softened and his tones were gentler as he replied: "If it be any satisfaction to you to learn the whole truth of the wretched story I will relate it."

And he proceeded to narrate those particulars with which the reader is already acquainted. Launcelot listened with the most rapt attention. Terrible as was the catastrophe of the unfortunate Lady Rhodes, it was a profound relief to him to find that his father had been saved from the actual crime, and that his worst fears were unfounded. But many thoughts were passing through his mind while Strafford was speaking; he thought of the child whom his father had rendered doubly an orphan; he thought of the melancholy, the blight which had saddened all Ethel's young life; but for the noble, generous protection of the man who stood before him what might have been her fate! And this man was doomed to death and he was beleagued with the men who had sworn his destruction. His father had lost her both her parents, and he, the son, was helping to destroy her husband. The thought appalled him. Could he not save the Earl? And so be forsworn—a traitor to his party! Terrible alternatives both. He might warn him of the peril in which he stood without indicating its nature or whence it threatened; but even that would be to betray the confidence he was pledged to preserve. In answer to that doubt there

rose before him Ethel's widowed form, which would carry evermore the awful reproach that a word from him might have saved her husband and he would not speak it. That thought overwhelmed all scruples.

"I know at least now the extent of my unhappy father's guilt," he said after a silence, "and imagination can no longer clothe the reality in yet darker colours. Pardon me, my lord, if I presume to express how deeply your noble conduct throughout this sad history has touched me. I would if possible show you some gratitude. Let me then warn you that your enemies have determined upon your destruction; that if you remain in England they will find means to accomplish it. Quit the country before the Parliament meets or you are lost beyond the power of man to save you. This is no vague warning; I speak upon the most certain grounds and I offer it as some small expiation to the Countess for past wrongs. For *her* sake I conjure you not to neglect it. Do not question me for I can answer nothing."

Throughout this speech the Earl's countenance had not moved a muscle; although Launcelot's was white as marble, with big drops of sweat standing upon it.

Fearful of being detained, or of his sympathies tempting him to more explicit disclosures, he snatched up his hat and without one word of adieu hurried from the chamber.

Soon afterwards he was hurrying through the dark streets of the city, not knowing nor caring whither he was going.

The night was damp and cold; but his brow was bathed in perspiration and his blood was burning with fever. To him it seemed that he had branded himself with eternal infamy; that he was a perjurer, a traitor, an informer; false to himself, false to the men who trusted him, a dishonoured man.

"And yet I have done no more than the justice that God has imposed upon us," he thought. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; I have given an honour for an honour, perhaps a life for a life."

CHAPTER XII.

IRREVOCABLE.

LAUNCELOT'S warnings and the unceasing urgings and importunities of Lady Strafford were truly but the echoes of the Earl's own fears and misgivings. He knew the number and strength of his enemies, he knew the universal clamour they had raised against him throughout the land and he mistrusted the power, and, alas ! even the firmness of the King to protect him. Had there been but himself to think of he would not have stirred one step but would have met his fate with the stoicism of a Regulus ; but, as we have seen, his domestic affections, his love for his wife and children were one of the dominant passions of his nature ; for their sakes he resolved to make an effort to save himself. He had fully intended to be present at the opening of Parliament ; he now changed his mind and wrote a letter to the King, in which he begged him to dispense with his attendance.

"I shall not be able to do your Majesty any service there," he wrote, "but should rather be a means to hinder your affairs, in regard as I foresee that the great envy and ill-will of the Parliament and of the Scots will be bent against me ; whereas, if I keep out of sight, I would not be so much in their mind as I should be by showing myself in Parliament ; and if they should fall upon me, I being at a distance, whatever they conclude against me I might the better avoid and retire from any danger, having the liberty

of being out of their hands and to go over to Ireland, or to some other place where I might be most serviceable to your Majesty."

It was a great humiliation to his pride to show this fear to his enemies, but he submitted for the sake of those dearer to him than himself. And it was joyful news to Ethel that he had abandoned his journey to London, for she was fully conscious of the imminence of his danger and looked forward to the assembling of this Parliament with a prophetic dread.

The next morning he despatched a messenger with the epistle and orders to ride night and day until he placed it in the King's hands, and to use the same speed in returning with the answer.

The time which intervened between the departure and return was one of gloom and anxiety; he repented of having been guilty of what he esteemed a weakness; never had he been so dissatisfied with any action of his life; and to the rack of the mind was added the anguish of the body from a painful illness.

On the fifth day the messenger returned with the answer.

It was cold and brief.

"STRAFFORD," it commenced,

"You have asked what it is impossible for us to grant. Never had we greater need of every loyal subject about us than now, or of all wise and trusty counsellors whose good counsels we shall much need. We must therefore command your presence with all convenient speed. Be assured you have nothing to fear and that we will hold fast to our royal word; *the Parliament shall not touch one hair of your head.*

"CHARLES R."

It was with a feeling of relief, almost of joy, that Strafford perused this epistle. It rescued him from a self-imposed humiliation and satisfied his conscience, for whatever might ensue he had at least offered to escape the danger; it was by the King's command not by his own will he acted now.

But it was a terrible blow to Ethel. Not even the fear of her lord's displeasure could prevent her inveighing bitterly against the King's selfishness. He arranged that Ethel and

the children should remain at York at least until they heard from him.

Within twelve hours after the receipt of the letter he had arisen from his sick-bed and was on his way to obey its mandate.

Book VIII.—The Block.

CHAPTER I

THE IMPEACHMENT.

NEVER was an English Parliament opened under such a gloomy and melancholy aspect as was that destined to be the most famous in our annals. From the first it was big with portent. There was no procession or pomp and little ceremony. The King went privately in his barge to Parliament Stairs with no more attendants than were absolutely necessary. He was received in the house with silent coldness and every face he looked upon was stern and haughty. Such a reception seriously affected him, and his speech was vague and embarrassed. Troubles and difficulties began at the first step. His Majesty had selected Sir Thomas Gardiner, the recorder of London, for Speaker ; but intrigue and corruption were set to work, and successfully, to prevent his election to any of the City seats, and Mr. Lenthall, a lawyer of Lincoln's Inn, was placed in the chair instead. The moment the King quitted the house the clamour commenced ; there was not a member who had not a petition of his representatives to read, in the which was set forth a whole list of grievances. All these complaints were voted to be legitimate without one opposing voice.

Day by day the clamour both in Parliament and out

waxed louder and more threatening, and farmers and tradespeople came up from the country in bands with complaints and grievances. Everywhere, in the public places, in the pulpits, the Court and the ministers were denounced and punishment of the "delinquents" loudly demanded.

On the 9th of November Strafford arrived in London. He sent a messenger to the King to acquaint him with his arrival; but the fatigues of the journey had so utterly prostrated him that he found it impossible even to get as far as Whitehall, and was conveyed in an almost insensible state to a house in Austin Friars, which had been his town dwelling in years gone by. The whole of the next day a low intermittent fever confined him to his bed.

The news of his arrival spread throughout London in a few hours. A secret council was held on the 10th by the leaders of the Commons, and his impeachment resolved upon for the next day. Already Charles repented of having summoned the Earl to London, for he could no longer fail to perceive the terrible storm which was about to descend upon him.

About noon on the fatal 11th the Earl insisted upon visiting the King, and was conveyed to Whitehall in a carriage.

He found Charles worn out with anxiety.

"My poor Strafford," he said, "why have you undertaken such a journey in this state of health?"

"In obedience to your Majesty's commands," replied the Earl.

"Would you had disobeyed them!" responded the King gloomily. "Have you heard of the insolence of these men—of the monstrous lengths to which they are proceeding! I am no longer a sovereign; they set my authority at defiance. You counselled me against Parliaments; too late I perceive the wisdom of your advice. What can be done now?"

"There is but one course, your Majesty, that I can advise. Go to the house, boldly dissolve it, expel the members and lock the doors. Invite the people to lay their petitions in your hands, promise the redress of oppressive grievances—and *observe* it."

"But how are we to obtain supplies, of which we never stood in such great need as now? Your counsel is too desperate; these rebels would take up arms against us."

"Whatever your Majesty may decide I fear the sword will be appealed to at last. The insolence of these traitors will grow with every concession. Better for you to strike the first blow than that they should."

"And plunge my unhappy kingdom into civil war," answered the King shuddering; "no, I cannot do that."

In the midst of their conference a page entered to announce that a gentleman who had just come from the Parliament House was desirous of communicating most important intelligence to his Majesty.

The King desired him to be admitted.

"Some new insolence, some further attack upon our prerogative, I suppose," he said, turning to Strafford.

The next moment there entered a gentleman whose pale and agitated countenance proclaimed his news to be serious.

"Your Majesty," he said, kneeling before the King, "I have been sent to inform you that the Commons is now sitting with closed doors, and that in the course of this sitting Mr. Pym intends to impeach the Earl of Strafford for high treason."

The King became white as death, and his lips could scarcely form the words, "We thank you, sir; you can retire."

When they were alone again he turned his glance upon the Earl, who remained as calm as though this intelligence in no way affected him.

"Strafford," he said, stammering with his fear, "you must fly at once; all the resources of my household are at your command; there is yet time for escape; retire to Ireland; I will defend your cause in your absence."

"Too late, sire," replied Strafford. "I would not now fly before these traitors to escape a hundred deaths; they shall never have that crown to their victory. I will meet them upon their own ground; it shall be impeachment for impeachment. I have with me undoubted proofs of a traitorous correspondence between Pym, St. John, and other leaders of the factious party with the Scottish rebels; this instant, with your Majesty's permission, I will repair to Westminster, and while they are concocting their charges I will place these papers in the hands of the peers; the battle will be then to the strongest."

His nostrils quivered and dilated and a colour rose to his sallow cheek.

In vain did the King advise him to adopt a more conciliatory policy; he firmly but respectfully persisted in his resolution, until weary of argument Charles was fain to give way.

"Have no fear for your ultimate safety, for remember that is guaranteed by our royal pledge," were his parting words.

The clock was striking three as Strafford presented himself at the door of the peers' chamber. The usher, knowing what was going on within, barred his passage, stammering some vague excuse. But an imperious rebuke quickly made him give way, and throwing open the doors with his own hand the Earl advanced haughtily towards his seat.

For a second the stillness of death fell upon the assembly and every eye was turned in amazement upon the audacious intruder. Then a voice, that was immediately echoed by three or four others, bade him retire.

With his hand resting upon the arm of his chair he faced round to the speakers and demanded by what authority they ordered him to do so. That glittering eye and haughty presence had not yet lost their spell and each man waited for his neighbour to reply to the challenge. But in the pause there was heard the trampling of many feet, and up to the bar of the chamber came a deputation of the Commons, headed by the Earl's bitterest foe—Pym.

A spy had brought him intelligence that Strafford was on his way to the house, and he had on the instant arranged this *coup d'état*. Upon the nature of the deputation's message being demanded, Pym answered that they were there in the name of all the Commons of England to impeach Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, Baron of Raby, &c., enumerating his numerous titles and dignities, of high treason and other heinous crimes and misdemeanours of which the said Commons would in due time make proof in form; but that in the meanwhile they desired he should be sequestered from all employment, and placed in safe custody."

Strafford never moved throughout this speech, but kept his eye fixed upon the speaker, who bold as he was shifted uneasily beneath its gaze.

Emboldened by Pym's words many of the lords again clamorously called upon the Earl to withdraw. He remained in the same immovable attitude until the clamour had subsided, and then replied in a voice that rang through the hall :

“Not until you have heard me.”

Again the old spell subdued the murmurers to silence ; and then the Earl spoke, neither defiantly nor submissively but with due regard to the august tribunal before which he stood as well as to his own dignity.

“It is my great misfortune,” he said, “to lie under so heavy a charge of which I am wholly innocent, as I shall beyond doubt shortly make appear to you ; yet I desire that I may keep my liberty until my guilt shall be proved ; and I would have you consider what mischief you will bring upon yourselves if upon so general a charge a peer of the realm shall be committed to prison, and so deprived of his place in this house where he was summoned by the King's writ to assist in his Majesty's councils ; and I would likewise have you consider of the consequences of such a precedent to your privileges and birthright. These men,” he went on pointing to Pym and his companions, and changing his tone to one of scorn, “these men accuse me of treason ; I cast back their accusation, which will fit them better than me, and this I will prove by——”

Here a tremendous clamour drowned his voice, for every man there feared lest some intrigue of his own might be brought to light in these revelations. Nor would they again listen to one word that fell from his lips. Finding at length that persistence was in vain he was compelled to retire to wait the decision of the House.

The debate was brief, for every man had already decided in his heart upon the Earl's condemnation. Within a few minutes he was recalled and ordered to kneel at the bar. This done, the Keeper of the Great Seal from the Woolsack pronounced that he should be committed to the custody of the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod, there to remain until the House of Commons should bring in a particular charge against him.

Then the Earl rose from his knees, bowed gravely, but spoke no word and followed the Gentleman Usher out of the chamber.

That same night a messenger started for York bearing to the Countess the sad news of the Earl's arrest, together with this letter :

"SWEETHEART, — I never pitied you so much as I do now. As to myself, albeit all be done against me that art and malice can devise, with all rigour possible, yet I am in great inward quietness, and a strong belief God will deliver me out of all these troubles. The more I look into my case the more hope I have, and sure if there be any honour and justice left, my life will not be in danger ; and for anything else time, I trust, will salve any other hurt that can be done me. Therefore hold up your heart ; look to the children and your house ; let me have your prayers ; and at last, by God's good pleasure, we shall have our deliverance, when we may as little look for it as we did for this blow of misfortune, which, I trust, will make us better to God and man.

"Your loving Husband,

"STRAFFORD."

She did not faint ; she did not even shed a tear when she heard the news ; it seemed as though her heart had suddenly turned to stone. Her unnatural composure quite alarmed the messenger, who was himself trembling and weeping.

A few days afterwards she was in London.

We pass over the sad family meeting, for enough of such scenes will come hereafter. Ethel begged to remain with her husband, but he would not have it so. He would be so much occupied in preparing his defence, he said, and her presence might prove a hindrance. But his true reason was to conceal from her as much as possible the sufferings of his mind and body and the extreme danger in which he stood.

CHAPTER II.

THE TRIAL.

WITH the arrest of Strafford began the deluge. Within a short period the Lord Keeper Finch and Secretary Windebanke were compelled to fly beyond the seas, and Archbishop Laud was sent to keep the Earl company in the Tower. The rapidity with which the Parliamentary party proceeded until they had stripped the King of all authority and reduced the nation from an absolute monarchy to an extreme democracy, are matters of history, the details of which do not come within the scope of this narrative.

In the meanwhile there were no means too foul to be resorted to in obtaining evidence true or false to procure the Earl's condemnation. Witnesses were collected from the three kingdoms. The one firm friend, Sir George Radcliffe, who could have refuted half the charges, was arrested by Pym's orders and cast into prison upon some frivolous pretence. This relentless foe even went the length of compelling the King to release the privy councillors from their oaths of secrecy, so that they should report any words that had fallen from the Earl that might assist the prosecution ; an instance of dishonourable arbitrariness scarcely to be paralleled in our annals. A committee of thirteen, chosen by the Commons, together with a few peers, prepared the charges and examined papers and witnesses, and these were bound by oath not to disclose any of their proceedings, so that the prisoner might not have the means of preparing a defence. A statement of

the charges which would be brought against him was given to the Earl, but he found therein nothing which he was not able to refute, for he never dreamed of the falsehood and treachery that were at work. He could in nowise understand how the charge of high treason could be substantiated against him, since he had been the most faithful and indefatigable servant of the King, from whom all power flowed. His hopes rose and he sat down and wrote to Ethel :

“SWEETHEART,—It is long since I writ unto you, for I am here in such trouble as gives me little or no respite. The charge is now come in, and I am now able, I praise God, to tell you that I conceive there is nothing capital ; and at the worst, I know his Majesty will pardon all, without hurting my fortune ; and then we shall be happy in God’s grace. Therefore comfort yourself, for I trust these clouds will away, and that we shall have fair weather afterwards. Farewell !

“Your loving Husband,
“STRAFFORD.”

And these words brought some comfort to the bleeding heart to which they were addressed.

At length, all being prepared, the 22nd of March was fixed for the opening of the trial. Never had the ancient Hall of Westminster worn so imposing an aspect as on that memorable day. Scaffolds, eleven stages high, and divided by rails, were erected on either side. Upon the highest of these sat the commissioners of Scotland and the lords of Ireland. In the centre were the peers, and the Lord Keeper and the judges in their scarlet robes were on the woolsack. At the upper end, beyond the peers, was a chair raised under a cloth of state for the King and another for the Prince. But the King was not upon the throne, his presence as Sovereign at such a time being contrary to the law. On each side the cloth of state were two cabinets or galleries. The King, Queen, and their Court occupied one of these, while the other was reserved for the foreign nobility. At the foot of the state-cloth was a scaffold for ladies of quality.

Every corner of the spacious chamber was occupied. And without dense crowds filled Palace Yard and blocked every approach.

The Earl, guarded by two hundred men of the trainbands, was brought from the Tower by water. From the Palace Stairs, where he landed, to the Hall was an unbroken line of people. One of the noblest traits of the English character is its respect for fallen greatness, even for that of an enemy ; and never was this generosity more admirably displayed than on that occasion. Calm and majestic as though he were proceeding, as he had so often done from those stairs, to take part in the deliberations of the Parliament, the Earl stepped from the boat and moved towards the Hall. A strong guard held all the approaches to keep back the people and repress any show of violence ; but it was not needed ; for everywhere the crowd made way before him uncovering their heads ; scarcely a hostile murmur was heard ; every face was grave, the greater number respectful, many pitiful. His form was attenuated and stooped a little beneath the weight of sickness, while his black costume, relieved only by the George upon his breast, still further heightened the pallor of his features.

Every murmur was hushed and every eye in that vast assemblage was fixed upon him as he entered the Hall. But his step never faltered, his face never changed as he moved on to the farther end to a small desk ; besides him stood the Lieutenant of the Tower and behind him were placed four secretaries. Resting a hand upon the desk he glanced around that wilderness of human heads which rose on all sides, and from floor to ceiling. For an instant his gaze rested on the pale worn features of Lady Carlisle, who was seated in a conspicuous position among the ladies ; their eyes met ; hers shrank away, his gave no sign of recognition.

All being in their places, the proceedings commenced. The prosecution was opened by Pym in a speech of great power.

“ My lords,” he said, “ we stand here by the command of the knights, citizens, burgesses, now assembled for the Commons in Parliament ; and we are here to make good the impeachment whereby Thomas Earl of Strafford stands charged, in their name, and in the name of all the Commons of England, with high treason. It is the cause of the King ; it concerns his Majesty in the honour of his Government, in the safety of his person, in the stability of his Crown. It is the cause of the kingdom. It concerns not only the peace

and prosperity, but even the being of the kingdom. We have that piercing eloquence—the cries and groans and tears and prayers of all subjects—assisting us. We have the three kingdoms, England and Scotland and Ireland, in travail and agitation with us, bowing themselves, like the hinds spoken of in Job, to cast out their sorrows. The first thing I shall observe in this preamble, my lords, is this, that having recited all those great and honourable offices which he hath done under his Majesty, he is bold to affirm that he hath been careful and faithful in the execution of all. He doth magnify his own endeavours in five particulars—1st, that he hath endeavoured the maintenance of religion; 2nd, that he hath endeavoured the honour of the King; 3rd, the increase of his revenues; 4th, the peace and honour and safety of the kingdom; 5th, the quiet and peace of the kingdom. I shall give short answers to every one of these. 1st, for religion, my lords, we shall say and prove that he hath been diligent to favour innovations, to favour superstition, to favour the encroachments of the clergy; but for religion, it hath never received any advantage by him, but a great deal of hurt. 2nd, for the honour of the King. My lords, we say it is for the honour of the King that he is the father of his people, that he is the fountain of justice, and it cannot stand with his honour and justice to have his government stained and polluted with tyranny and oppression. 3rd, for the increase of his revenue. It is true there may be some additions of some; but we say there is no addition of strength or wealth, because in those parts where it hath been increased the Earl hath taken the greatest share himself. And when he hath spoiled and ravined on the people, he hath been content to yield up some part to the King, that he might with more security enjoy the rest. 4th, for the strength, and honour, and safety of the kingdom he hath let in upon us the calamities of war, shame, and confusion. 5th, and for the quiet of the subjects he hath been an incendiary—he hath armed us amongst ourselves, and made us weak and naked to all the world besides.”

He then proceeded to further enlarge upon these heads, and to prove his position by various statements. After which a number of witnesses were called to prove against the Earl various acts of tyranny in Ireland, and to deny that he had in any way bettered the condition of that

kingdom, but much the reverse. He was accused of appropriating oppressive monopolies, of raising the rates of merchandise, of giving undue encouragement to Papists, of composing all troops of that religion, of issuing general warrants against all persons refusing to submit to his illegal decrees and of billeting soldiers at free quarters upon them. As Lord President of the North he was accused of having procured powers subversive of all laws and of having committed insufferable acts of oppression; of having declared the people should find the King's little finger heavier than the reins of the law. As chief minister of England he was accused of opposing the summoning of Parliament, of having instigated the King to make war upon the Scots, of counselling him to raise money without the consent of his subjects, of proposing to employ Irish soldiers to reduce England to obedience—to coin base money—to raise a new levy of ship-money—to force a loan upon the City—and of threatening violence to those who refused to comply with his demands.

To these charges Strafford replied—That the enlarged instructions for the Council of York had not been procured by his solicitation; that the acts of oppression specified had been committed after his departure for Ireland; that many words imputed to him had been entirely twisted out of their true meaning. He maintained that Ireland being a conquered country the King's prerogative was greater there than in England; that the arbitrary judgments imputed to him were delivered by competent tribunals in which he had no voice; that the free quartering of troops was an ancient custom; that his bargains with the customs were for the good of the King and the country; that hostility against Scotland being resolved upon he had counselled an offensive in preference to a defensive war; that he had never advised a base coinage; and that his harsh expressions against the citizens of London applied to only one person. Throughout his defence every attempt was made to drown his words; both the Lords and the members of the Commons walked about talking loudly, refreshments were brought in and passed round, doors were opened and slammed and a great hubbub kept up about them.

“My lords,” he said, alluding to certain expressions imputed to him; “these words were not wantonly or un-

necessarily spoken, or whispered in a corner, but they were spoken in full Council, where, by the duty of my oath, I was obliged to speak according to my heart and conscience in all things concerning the King's service. As for delivering my mind openly and freely, shall I be in danger of my life as a traitor? My lords, I conjure you not to make yourselves so unhappy as to disable yourselves and children from undertaking the great charge and trust of the Commonwealth; you inherit that trust from your fathers; you are born in great thoughts; you are mixed up for the great and weighty employment of the kingdom. But if it be once admitted that a councillor, delivering his opinion with others at a council-table *candidè et castè*, under an oath of secrecy and faithfulness, shall be brought into question, upon some misapprehension or ignorance of the law, I know not any wise or noble person of fortune who will, under such perilous and unsafe terms, adventure to be counsellor to the King. If, my lords, words spoken to friends in familiar discourse, spoken in one's chamber, spoken at one's table, in one's sick-bed—spoken, perhaps, to gain better reason, to give himself more clear light and judgment by reasoning; if these things shall be brought against a man as treason, this, under favour, takes away all the comfort of human society; by this means we shall be debarred from speaking, the principal joy and comfort of society, with good and wise men to become wiser and better our lives. If these things be strained to take away life and honour and all that is desirable, it will be a silent world. A city will become a hermitage, and sheep will be found among a crowd and press of people, and no man shall dare impart his solitary thoughts to his friends and neighbours."

The Earl's noble and touching eloquence, the physical sufferings imprinted upon his countenance, his majestic presence, his dignified and dauntless behaviour, soon began to produce a profound impression upon his auditors. He so enlisted the sympathies of the clergy that Laud was forgotten; even the courtiers were melted; while the ladies became enthusiastic advocates of his cause and hung with tearful admiration upon every word that fell from his lips. Even the Chairman of the Committee, Whitelock, who prepared the impeachment, has left behind in his history of the trial a notification of his admiring sympathy. "Certainly,

man never acted such a part on such a theatre," he says, "with more wisdom, constancy, and eloquence; with greater reason, judgment, and temper, and with a better grace in all his words and gestures, than this great and excellent person did."

Pym was furious at these signs of sympathy and began to fear lest this strong reaction might prove so powerful that, spite of all his efforts, Strafford would be acquitted. To turn the tide some new and extraordinary piece of evidence was required. On the night of the day the Earl completed his defence, which was the seventeenth of the trial, there was held a secret meeting of his enemies the result of which appeared in next day's proceedings. One of the strongest charges against him was that of Sir Harry Vane, who asserted, that in the Privy Council, called immediately after the dissolution of the previous Parliament, the King having asked what course should now be taken, the Earl had replied, "Sire, you have now done your duty and your subjects have failed in theirs; and therefore you are absolved from the rules of government and may supply yourself by extraordinary ways; you must prosecute the war vigorously and you have an army in Ireland with which you may reduce this kingdom."

The Earl of Northumberland pretended to remember something of the first part of the sentence, but no other members of the Council, not even the Marquis of Hamilton, could be induced to assert that they recollected any such words. To establish this evidence two witnesses were indispensable to the forms of law; there was only one. But Pym and his associates found a means of overcoming this formality.

He opened the day's proceedings with a most plausible speech, wherein he stated that some months before the beginning of this Parliament he had visited Sir Harry Vane, and that they being together and condoling the sad condition of the kingdom, by reason of the many illegal taxes and pressures, Sir Harry told him that if he would call upon him next day he would show him somewhat that would give him much trouble and inform him what counsels were like to be followed to the ruin of the kingdom; for that he had in the perusal of some of his father's papers accidentally met with the result of the Cabinet Council upon the dissolution of the

last Parliament, which comprehended the resolutions then taken. Pym then went on to say that Sir Harry showed him a piece of paper upon which were letters and hieroglyphics, easily decipherable into the names of the members of the Council; that after some demur he had permitted him to take a copy of this paper which he now produced and proceeded to read. Under the sign of L.L. and j. (Lord Lieutenant of Ireland), he read:—"Absolved from rules of government—prosecute war vigorously—an army in Ireland to subdue the kingdom." This, he averred, was the abstract of the Earl's speech. He then went on to argue that *he*, having read the paper in the Secretary's handwriting, of which he was prepared to swear this was a true copy, constituted the second witness. "It is no wonder," he added, "that the other persons mentioned in the writing would not remember, as they had given equally bad counsel."

Pym having finished his part sat down to make room for the second actor, young Sir Harry Vane, who rose with an air of well-acted confusion, and confessed that all that had been stated was true; that his father being away and he having possession of his keys, he had felt a curiosity to ascertain the contents of a certain red velvet cabinet which stood among other boxes of papers. He had opened it and there found the document mentioned by Mr. Pym, which had made so deep an impression upon him that he felt himself bound in conscience to communicate his discovery to some person of better judgment than himself, who might be more able to prevent the mischiefs that were threatened therein. "I know," he concluded pathetically, "that this discovery will prove little less than my ruin in the good opinion of my father; but having been induced by the tenderness of my conscience towards my common parent, my country, to trespass against my natural father, I hope I shall find compassion in this House, though I have little hopes of pardon elsewhere."

And with a most lugubrious countenance he reseated himself, upon which up rose the father, the elder Vane, with a stern dismay upon his features.

"The ground of my misfortune is now discovered to me," he began in an agitated voice. "I was much amazed when I found myself pressed by such interrogatories as

made me suspect some discovery had been made by some persons conversant in the councils as myself ; but I am now satisfied to whom I owe this misfortune." He then went on to say that upon his return he had burned many papers, lest by any accident they might come into hands that might make any ill use of them ; and amongst those so destroyed was the original of that paper of which a copy had been read.

This scene was acted with so much skill, force, and passion, that scarcely any there doubted its truth, and from that hour the sympathy for the Earl began to wane. Three days afterwards Strafford resumed his defence in a most eloquent and pathetic speech.

" It is now full two hundred and forty years since treasons were defined, and so long has it been since any man was touched to this extent upon this crime, before myself. We have lived, my lords, happily to ourselves at home ; we have lived gloriously abroad to the world ; let us be content with what our fathers have left us ; let not our ambition carry us to be more learned than they were in these killing and destructive arts. Great wisdom it will be in your lordships, and just providence for yourselves, for your posterity, for the whole kingdom, to cast from you into the fire these bloody and mysterious volumes of arbitrary and constructive treasons, as the primitive Christians did their books of curious arts, and betake yourselves to the plain letter of the statute, which tells you where the crime is, and points out to you the path by which you may avoid it. Let us not, to our own destruction, awake those sleeping lions, by rattling up a company of old records which have lain so many ages by the wall, forgotten and neglected. To all my afflictions add not this, my lords, the most severe of any ; that I, for my other sins, not for my treasons, be the means of introducing a precedent so pernicious to the laws and liberties of my native country. My lords," he concluded, " I have now troubled your lordships a great deal longer than I should have done. Were it not for the interest of those pledges which a saint in heaven left me I should be loath— [Here, for the first time, his firmness gave way, and tears choked his utterance]. What I forfeit for myself is nothing, but I confess that my indiscretion should forfeit for them wounds me very deeply. You will be pleased to pardon my

infirmity. Something I should have said, but I see I shall not be able ; therefore I shall leave it. And now, my lords, I thank God I have been by His blessing sufficiently instructed in the extreme vanity of all temporary enjoyments compared to the importance of our eternal duration. And so, my lords, even so, with all humility, and with all tranquillity of mind, I submit clearly and freely to your judgment ; and whether that righteous doom shall be to death or life, I shall repose myself, full of gratitude and confidence, in the arms of the great Author of my existence."

A murmur of pity and admiration ran through the hall. Full of fury at the sound Pym rose to answer. But as he did so he caught the full glare of Strafford's eye ; for a moment the worn face lit up with such an expression of passionate scorn that it abashed even the savage effrontery of that man ; he faltered, paused, sought nervously for a paper that was under his eyes ; it was the answer he had prepared ; as he read it there was a perceptible unsteadiness in his voice, he stumbled over the words and showed other signs of embarrassment which were greatly increased by the rage he felt at his own weakness.

This humiliation, as he knew it to be, increased his malignancy tenfold. The next day, in spite of the opposition of Selden and other prominent men, he forced the second reading of the bill of attainder. He and his associates even endeavoured to abruptly close the trial, to prevent the prisoner's counsel being heard, and even threatened to punish "those insolent counsel who had dared to undertake the defence of a man whom the house had declared guilty of high treason." The lords resisted this monstrous proposition ; but the Commons would not listen to the defence, saying it was beneath their dignity to dispute with lawyers. In vain did men most learned in the law declare there was no ground or colour to declare the Earl guilty of high treason ; even several among the peers who had previously been his foes, touched by conscience and justice, declared they could not admit the Vane evidence as satisfactory, for it was upon that, being the only evidence worthy of the name, that the sentence was to be decided.

These objections were answered by St. John in a speech, the astounding effrontery of which surpassed all its predecessors, for he maintained that although no evidence at

all might have been adduced against the Earl the private satisfaction of each man's conscience should be sufficient to convict him.

And as to the passing of the law, "It is true," he said, "we give law to hares and deer because they are beasts of chase, but it was never accounted cruelty or foul play to knock foxes or wolves on the head, as they can be found, because they are beasts of prey."

It was on the 21st of April, the thirty-first of the trial, that the third reading of the bill was taken. Although the result could scarcely be in doubt, the auditory waited the announcement of the division with breathless interest. But despondency was on the face of every friend, for during the trial the Earl had won many who had been before hostile, and triumph lit up the features of every foe.

Had not all attention been so strained towards one personage, there were two figures upon the ladies' benches which might have attracted curious notice. The one sat in a foremost row; each day of the trial, from the opening to the closing of the court, she had occupied the same position; she was dressed in black, with a black veil gathered about her head so as to conceal her features at will. It was the Countess of Carlisle. In those thirty-one days she had aged years; the haughty beauty of her face was vanished; it was white, and drawn, and full of woe.

In a corner of the topmost scaffold sat another lady, also clothed in black, with a hood drawn over her head and entirely concealing her features. For the last few days she also had occupied that place. It was Ethel. Her husband had wished her not to be present at the trial, and obedient in all things she had submitted to his wishes; but as day after day went on it seemed to her as though she must fall dead beneath this harrowing suspense unless she could hear and see the progress of this terrible event; and so she procured admittance to the hall, and Strafford never suspected her presence.

At length the division was proclaimed, the bill had passed by a great majority; there were only fifty-nine voted against it. The announcement was received in dead silence, which was broken by a deep sob, audible only to those near the place whence it proceeded; but there was an immediate commotion on the ladies' benches. Ethel had fallen fainting.

To hear the more distinctly she had, forgetful of all else, drawn aside her hood and her features were now exposed to view. Soon it was whispered from ear to ear that it was Lady Strafford ; all who were near gathered about the spot, everyone stood on tip-toe to catch a glimpse of her, and hundreds of eyes were dimmed with tears at the sight of that pale suffering face.

Ere the prisoner, who had been withdrawn during the last deliberation, was brought back to the bar, she was carried out.

Strafford listened to the announcement of the vote with unflinching calmness.

Once his eyes turned upon the spot where, rigid as a statue, Lady Carlisle still sat. There was a look almost of appeal upon her face as it met his gaze, which instantly changed to the same expression of passionate scorn that it had cast upon Pym. She shrank from it as though a fire had swept before her, and drew her veil close.

CHAPTER III.

TOLD AT LAST.

ONE of those fifty-nine dissentients who voted against the Earl's condemnation was Sir Launcelot Franklin. He had heard that faint cry, he had seen Ethel's fainting form borne from the Hall, he had looked down upon that marble face, so awful in its agonising despair, and it smote his heart with an anguish inferior only to her own. His chivalrous sense of honour, which no passion or opinion could blunt, revolted against the gross injustice of this trial, and he could perceive no difference between the despotism of a parliament and the despotism of a monarch; for to him crime and oppression received no halo because it was done in the name of freedom. Day by day his pity for this great if erring man, so dauntless in his courage amidst universal enmity, increased. And that grand figure, solitary to every other eye, was companioned to his, for ever beside it he saw Ethel's pale anxious face. None the less heinous for this pity had become to him the Earl's offences against the liberty of the people; but injustice had rendered him a wronged man; he had proved his innocence of all charges, and banishment was the heaviest punishment that could be justly inflicted upon him. Truly, the bill of attainder had yet to pass the House of Peers and to receive the royal assent; but Launcelot knew too well the power of the dominant party, to regard those as likely to prove successful hindrances.

Such were his reflections as he quitted the Hall and pushed his way through the dense crowd that besieged the doors. The excitement without had daily increased; but Pym, dissatisfied with the respect shown to the Earl, had leavened the mob with his creatures who roused their evil passions and goaded them to raise clamours for death and to hoot and yell at him as he passed in and out. The commotion was now tremendous, and the cries of "Cheers for Pym and the Commons!" and "Death to Strafford!" resounded on all sides.

Launcelot shuddered; he knew the agency that had created this excitement, and he knew its potency. Just as he was clearing the skirts of the crowd he felt a hand grip his shoulder, and turning round, came face to face with a man whom he had not met for some years—Bellasis.

"Have you voted for Strafford's death?" was his abrupt and excited question.

"I have not," answered Launcelot, surprised at this strange greeting.

"Give me your hand then," and Bellasis grasped it until the bones cracked. "Is it not infamous? there is not a tittle of evidence against him," he went on hotly. "Did Henry the Eighth ever commit an act of such abominable despotism? Is this the freedom our Parliament is to give us?"

"For your own sake I would advise you to lower your tones," replied Launcelot. "But I understood you were always opposed to the Earl?"

"In my days of hot-brained folly I was; but I have grown wiser since I discarded the companionship of that black-hearted villain, John Savile, who was my evil genius for years. I tell you, Franklin, that I would at this moment sacrifice all I possess in the world to save that brave man who has so nobly defended himself against these canting rogues."

He was speaking loudly, and Launcelot hurried him on; but as he pronounced these last words a man brushed rapidly past them, yet not so quickly but that Franklin caught sight of the sardonic features of John Savile. His companion was too eager upon the subject that seemed to engross all his thoughts to notice this encounter, but it gave Launcelot some uneasiness; and indeed that dark figure never crossed his path without leaving a shadow behind it.

Bellasis had taken his arm, and talking rapidly all the time, drew him across the Broad Sanctuary towards Tothill Street. He now insisted upon adjourning to a tavern, and Launcelot finding that he could not rid himself of him was fain to comply.

Bellasis had referred to his "hot-brained youth" as though it were a thing of the past; but, to judge by his present manners, years did not seem to have cooled his impetuosity.

The tavern they entered was that which has been frequently mentioned in these pages, *The Cock*. Since his return from York Launcelot had made several visits thither, in the hope of meeting Hornby, to whom he desired to impart the communication he had received from Strafford; but up to the present time he could obtain no tidings of him.

Upon entering the hostelry the first person his eyes fell upon was the man he sought. Hornby attempted to avoid him, but Launcelot with a brief apology to Bellasis hurried after him.

"I have news for you," he said; "news that will glad your heart as it has not been gladdened for many a year."

"Are cut-throats become so scarce that kings are going to raise their pay?" inquired the other with a cynical laugh; "that is the only news can glad me."

But Launcelot could perceive this indifference was only assumed, for a look of curious interest lurked in the depths of those dull bloodshot eyes.

"Join myself and Bellasis in a cup of wine," said Launcelot. "I will rid myself of him as quickly as possible, and then we can talk together. Prepare yourself for wonderful news."

Hornby hesitated for a moment; but curiosity got the better of him, and he followed Launcelot into the room where Bellasis was awaiting him.

"Surely I know that face," said the latter. "What, my old opponent once more!"

The conversation immediately turned upon the all-absorbing topic—Strafford.

"So the bill has passed the Commons," observed Hornby; "well, he deserves his fate."

Bellasis was about to burst into an impetuous speech when Launcelot stayed him by a sign, and answered in a tone of much sternness :

"You are the last man who should say so, for he has been the noblest friend to you and to *yours*."

The strong emphasis with which he pronounced the last word startled Hornby out of his cynicism ; he raised his eyes to Launcelot's and read there that which checked the ribald answer upon his lips and subdued him to silence.

Bellasis's feverish excitement would not permit him to rest long in one place, and perceiving that there was some secret understanding between Franklin and the other, he very soon rose and took his leave, begging Launcelot to visit him.

When he was gone Hornby turned abruptly to his companion and demanded : "Now, what is this news you have to tell me?"

They were in a private room ; Launcelot rose and closed the door, which Bellasis had left open, then drew his seat close to the soldier's, and in a low earnest voice repeated to him the narrative almost word for word as he had heard it from Strafford's lips.

At first Hornby endeavoured to conceal the agitation and absorbing interest which he evidently felt ; but as the story proceeded he could no longer uphold the mask, and all the violent emotions of his soul were pictured upon his face. Throughout he never interrupted by a single word ; when it was done his head fell upon his breast, and there was silence.

"Do you believe all this to be true?" he inquired at last, without raising his head.

"As devoutly as I believe in my God," replied Launcelot solemnly ; "Wentworth never lied."

Again there was silence. Hornby drew his slouched hat over his face to conceal its workings.

"Had I but known this twenty years back," he muttered.

"You might have known it ten years ago had you not been headstrong."

"It was too late then."

"Not so, for all this time you might have been blessed with a daughter's love."

"Ay."

"You will see her now, will you not? It may be comfort to her to find a parent now she is about to lose a husband. It must indeed be true that God chasteneth those He loveth, for He hath poured all the vials of affliction upon her head. Had you seen her as I did to-day, like a broken flower——"

His tears choked his utterance.

"I cannot tell what I shall do yet," replied Hornby in a muffled voice, his face still hidden; "leave me to myself; meet me here to-morrow at this time."

"You will not refuse me your hand *now*," said Launcelot.

The soldier grasped the proffered one firmly, but without speaking.

But as soon as he was alone he laid his face prone upon the table and clasped his hands across his head—and sobbed.

It had been many and many a year since those rough cheeks had been moistened by a tear.

CHAPTER IV

THE KING SIGNS.

ON the day following the conclusion of the trial papers were posted in all the public places of Westminster and the City, upon which were inscribed the names of the fifty-nine members who had voted against the bill of attainder, and at the bottom were the words: "STRAFFORDIANS, or ENEMIES TO THEIR COUNTRY." The Puritans preached against the Earl from every pulpit and prayed for the punishment of this "great delinquent." Mobs gathered daily round Westminster Hall armed with swords, knives, and sticks, shouting, "Death to the traitor! Justice, justice!" menacing the Lords as they passed in and out and threatening destruction to all who should oppose the bill. The Peers still hesitated to consign their names to the infamy of such an act; they complained to the Commons of these attempts to force their judgment, but their remonstrances were treated only with contempt. To increase the fury of the mob Pym circulated reports that the Court was raising an army against the Parliament. Then came rumours that spread a panic throughout the metropolis, that the House of Commons was undermined, and was about to be blown up; the names of several courtiers were mentioned in connection with this supposititious plot, and a few knowing that innocence was no protection fled for their lives, thus apparently confirming and increasing the alarm. A most dastardly cowardice characterised the nobles of this time in all their acts; they

trembled before the mob, and so they were lost; for an aristocracy is safe no longer than it is true to itself. The judges, in an equal spirit of poltroonery, frightened by popular clamour, now declared that upon a further examination of the case they were of opinion that Strafford's offence came within the law of high treason.

On the 7th of May came the final debate of the Peers. The tumult without, the cries of "Justice, justice!" almost drowned the voices of the speakers. Thirty-four of the lords who were present at the trial, unable to perjure their consciences yet fearful of the rabble, absented themselves; nineteen were manly enough to vote against the attainder; but the bill was carried by a narrow majority of seven.

All that was now needed for its execution was the Royal assent. The next day the rabble congregated about Whitehall as they had about Westminster, yelling, "We will have justice!" to coerce the King as they had done the Peers.

The sudden and strange death of the Earl of Bedford, a man of great abilities, who although united with the popular party had secretly engaged with Charles to preserve Strafford's life, greatly increased the difficulty of the King's position and left him without one able friend to support the cause of his unhappy minister, while upon all sides there were enemies ready to counsel his sacrifice.

On the second day after the trial Charles wrote this letter to the Earl:

"The misfortune that has fallen upon you by the strange mistaking and conjuncture of these times being such that I must lay by the thought of employing you hereafter in my affairs, yet I cannot satisfy myself in honour or conscience without assuring you now, in the midst of your troubles, that, upon the word of a King, you shall not suffer in honour, life, or fortune. This is but justice, and therefore a very mean reward from a master to so faithful and able a servant as you have showed yourself to be; yet it is as much as I conceive the present times will permit, though none shall hinder me from being,

"Your constant, faithful friend,

"CHARLES R."

"Whitehall, April 23."

Not knowing to whom to turn for assistance the King suddenly bethought him of Denzil Hollis. He was Strafford's brother-in-law ; he had not appeared in the Earl's prosecution ; and Charles knew him to be a man of high honour and integrity. He sent for him to Whitehall.

"You, Mr. Hollis," he said, "are his kinsman by marriage ; your sister was the mother of his children ; and, unless general report is false, he was to her a most devoted husband. Truly, then, there must be in your heart some pity, if not towards him, towards your sister's children. You are a man of power among the Parliament party ; can you devise or suggest any means of saving this unhappy man ?"

"Although we have not been friends of late I sincerely pity him, your Majesty," replied Hollis, "and could I save his life I would most gladly do so ; but not to be again admitted into the councils of the kingdom, for I hold no punishment that escapes death too severe for his manifold offences against free government."

"Let it be perpetual banishment," cried the King, eagerly ; "I will solemnly undertake never again to hold communication with him ; surely you can accomplish this much ?"

"I cannot say so, your Majesty ; Mr. Pym, Mr. St. John, and many others who have greater sway in the Parliament than I, have sworn his death, but I will do what lies in my power if your Majesty will help me."

"How, in what way ?"

"Let your Majesty instruct Strafford to draw up a petition for reprieve, and present it to Parliament yourself in person ; this will do much ; in the meantime I will work to the utmost among the Commons to induce them to be content with the Earl's banishment."

"Present the petition myself—the King petition his subjects ?" answered Charles with a displeased look.

"I fear me, your Majesty, naught else will prove of any avail," replied Hollis coldly.

"I thank you, sir, for your counsel and will give it due consideration," said the King.

And so the interview terminated.

The Queen, who had been told of this visit by one of the spies who kept her constantly informed of all persons who

were admitted to his Majesty's presence, very soon wheedled from him Hollis's proposition.

Although Lady Carlisle and her agents had since the Earl's arrest discontinued their intrigues, Henrietta Maria was implacable as ever against the minister she had always hated, and now opposed with passionate indignation what she termed such a degradation of the royal person, strenuously urging the King at the same time to end the struggle by signing the bill of attainder.

All that day he endured the greatest anguish of mind, both conscience and honour revolting against the sacrifice of Strafford; and yet he knew not how to avoid it. Towards evening he summoned a privy council. Full of care, but coldly stern was his face as he seated himself at the head of the table. Hamilton, Say, Essex, and all the principal councillors were there, together with the Archbishop of York and several other prelates. Nearly all looked nervous and anxious, for it was a time to shake nerves of iron.

Essex was the first to speak; in a bold, almost insolent tone, he said that the people would never rest until the Earl of Strafford was handed over to the headsman, and that no person ought to presume to advise anything contrary to the sense of both Houses of Parliament.

The next speaker, Hamilton, tendered the same advice, but with more plausibility.

"Heaven forefend, Sire," he said, "that I should ever live to offer your Majesty counsel that should tend to your dishonour, but, I fear me, there is no other way to preserve yourself and your posterity than by so doing, and therefore you ought to be more tender of the safety of the kingdom than that of any person how innocent soever. And I am clearly of opinion that the force and violence offered to your Majesty will be, before God and man, a just excuse for whatever you shall do."

All who spoke took up the same strain.

"There was a time, my lords," answered the King, with bitter scorn, "when honour was held by English gentlemen above all other considerations, when fortune or life weighed but as a feather in the scale against *that*, and when every noble would have fallen away from a perjured and dishonoured King as he would from a leper; those times are gone it

seems. What you propose is against my honour and my conscience, and I cannot, will not consent to it."

"A king, your Majesty," said the Archbishop of York, "should have two consciences, a private and a public one; his public conscience as a king might not only dispense with but oblige him to do that which is against his private conscience as a man. The question is not whether you will save the Earl of Strafford, but whether you will perish with him; the conscience of a king is to preserve his kingdom, the conscience of a husband is to preserve his wife, the conscience of a father is to preserve his children—all these are now in danger—and such considerations must abundantly weigh down all the considerations the conscience of a master or a friend can suggest for the preservation of a friend or servant."

This base sophistry was received with much satisfaction by all present.

The King made no reply, but rose from his seat and paced up and down the room with agitated steps and hands tightly clasped; a muttered ejaculation now and then breaking from his lips. The struggle was a severe one. The tumultuous murmurings of the mob could be heard without, occasionally bursting into shouts of "Justice! Death to the Straffordians!" Presently the tapestry that covered the entrance to the chamber was softly pushed aside and the councillors caught sight of the Queen, half-concealed amongst its folds; Charles did not perceive her.

Presently he resumed his seat, his face full of determination.

"My Lords," he said, speaking in a firm voice, "and you, your Grace, we know what you speak comes from your loves and from your anxiety for our safety, and these respects lead to dishonourable weakness; but if a solemn pledge is held to be the highest obligation among private men how much more should it be so to a king? I am certain there is not one here who would not rather take Strafford's place than act as he would counsel me to act. Whatever may be the consequences I will not break my pledge."

At that moment a tremendous yell of "Death to the Straffordians!" seemed to shake the very walls.

Charles felt a light touch upon his shoulder, and turning, saw the Queen standing beside him. A shade of vexation

fell upon his face, for he knew that his firmness was about to be subjected to a further strain.

"My lord," she said, sinking upon her knees, "let me join my entreaties to these messieurs ; listen to the cries of this *racaille*," waving her hand towards the windows, "does it not seem to answer your challenge ? They threaten to set fire to the palace—they even threaten your sacred life should you persist to refuse."

"Retire, madam," answered the King irritably. "My answer is given, and I will not revoke it."

The Queen rose to her feet, her eyes flashing with anger. "Then you love this man better than you do your wife and children," she said. "You would sacrifice us all to him. You forget your duty to me and to your children—then I will forget my duty to you. I will not be sacrificed. Since you have ceased to love me I will leave this vile country. I will go back to France."

"Silence, madam ; you know not what you say," interrupted the King.

But she went on with increased excitement. "I say, my lord, if you refuse to sign for that man's death I will this instant prepare to return to France."

The King's lips grew colourless as his face, and dank dew stood upon his brow.

At that moment there came an interruption—a summons for admittance. It was a page bearing a letter from the Earl of Strafford, he said, and the messenger had told him it must be delivered immediately.

A dark frown clouded the Queen's features, and chagrin was visible upon the lineaments of every councillor, for they believed this was an appeal and that their cause was now indeed lost. With trembling hands the King cut the silk, opened the letter and read. It was very long. Here are the concluding paragraphs :

"There is before me the ruin of my children and family, hitherto untouched by any foul crime ; here are before me the many ills which may befall your sacred person and the whole kingdom should yourself and Parliament part less satisfied with one another than is necessary for the preservation both of King and people ; here are before me the things most valued, most feared, by mortal men—LIFE OR

DEATH. To say, Sire, there hath not been a strife in me, were to make me less man than God knoweth my infirmities make me; and to call a destruction upon myself and my young children, where the intentions of my heart, at least, have been innocent of this great offence, may be believed, will find no easy consent from flesh and blood. After a long and hard struggle I have come to the only resolution befitting me; all private interest should give way to the happiness of your sacred person and of the State. I entreat you to remove, by attending to this bill, the obstacle which prevents a happy concord between you and your subjects. Sire, my consent herein shall acquit you more to God than all the world can do beside. To a willing man there is no injury done. By God's grace, my soul, about to quit this body, forgives all men and all things, with infinite contentment. I only ask you would grant to my poor son and his sisters as much kindness, neither more nor less, as their unfortunate father shall be deemed to merit, according as he shall one day ere long be held guilty or innocent."

A tear trickled down the King's cheek as he handed this epistle to Lord Say, and desired him to read it aloud.

The Queen had read it over his shoulder, and her face was now lit up with satisfaction.

"Your Majesty's conscience is now relieved of its last scruple, since the Earl himself releases you from your pledge," observed Hamilton.

"*Vous avez raison, monsieur,*" cried the Queen eagerly, "and his Majesty cannot hesitate another moment."

And she drew the fatal document which lay upon the table towards him, and offered him a pen without one spark of compassion in her heart for the noble self-sacrifice of the man she was hurrying to the scaffold.

"To me, my lords," said the King, putting aside the pen, "this letter seems to bind me yet closer to my pledge; how can I sign away the life of a servant so devoted?"

The Queen uttered an ejaculation of impatience.

"In the days of old Rome, your Majesty," observed Say, "it was considered the most glorious of all deaths to die for one's country; by refusing this heroic sacrifice of the Earl's you rob him of a crown of immortal glory."

"And by granting it," replied the King, "I crown

myself with eternal infamy. What will posterity say of the faithless monarch who could sacrifice such a subject to the clamours of the mob?"

"It will say that your country was above all other things dear to you," replied one of the bishops, "and that no personal considerations could weigh with you against the happiness of your subjects."

Again the Queen was kneeling at his side with one of those sweet appealing looks which had never failed to conquer her husband's most stubborn resolves, and holding the pen dipped in ink.

"Will you lose your wife or your minister?" she murmured softly.

"You cannot, Sire, refuse her Majesty's prayer thus tendered," said one of the lords.

There was a long anxious silence. The Queen still held her beseeching attitude, gently endeavouring to insert the pen between the King's rigid fingers.

The councillors sat watching their royal master, who lay back in his chair, his head leaning forward upon his breast, his eyes fixed upon the ground, so still, save for a tremulous movement of the closely-pressed bloodless lips that he might have been a carved figure.

Within the silence was breathless, but from without came the hum and the surge of the threatening mob.

At last the King grasped the pen, paused again as it touched the paper, shuddered, and hurriedly scrawled with averted head. Then, letting the pen fall covered his face with his hands, and so remained some seconds.

The Queen was most effusive in her protestations of affectionate gratitude.

"Sire, you have saved England," cried Say, "and won the eternal love of your people."

"Or sealed my own destruction," answered Charles. And uncovering his face, ghastly with the impress of a terrible agony, he added solemnly: "My lords, it seems to me I have signed my own death-warrant."

The next morning he was more tranquil. The struggle was past, and his weak nature felt incapable of renewing it. Already the contemplation of Strafford's death had lost most of its terrors, and he began to regard it in the light of the

inevitable. Being in such a disposition the Queen found little difficulty in persuading him against Hollis's proposition. Instead of going in person to solicit his minister's reprieve, he addressed the following cold heartless letter to the Parliament, and sent it by the Prince of Wales :

"I did yesterday satisfy the justice of the kingdom by passing the bill of attainder against the Earl of Strafford ; but mercy being as inherent and inseparable from a king as justice, I desire in some measure to show that likewise, by suffering that unfortunate man to fulfil the natural course of his life in a close imprisonment. Yet, so if ever he make the least offer to escape, or offer, directly or indirectly, to meddle in any sort of public business, especially by me, either by message or letter, it shall cost him his life without further process. This, if it may be done without the discontentment of my people, will be an unspeakable contentment to me. To which end I do by this letter earnestly desire your approbation, and to endear it more have chosen him to carry it that of all your house is most dear to me. So I desire that by a conference you will endeavour to give the House of Commons contentment, assuring you that the exercise of mercy is no more pleasing to me than to see both Houses of Parliament consent, for my sake, that I should moderate the severity of the law in so important a case."

In a postscript he added :

"If he must die it would be a charity to spare him until Saturday."

This letter was twice read in the Parliament, which did not deign even a comment upon it but ordered the Earl's execution for the following day.

CHAPTER V

THE BITTERNESS OF LIFE.

LAUNCELOT sought Hornby at the tavern according to appointment and found him there. A great change had come over him within twenty-four hours. His reckless cynical manner was gone; he was quite sober, a condition in which he had not been seen for many a day, and his air was subdued and grave.

Launcelot urged him to visit his daughter, but he would not consent.

"No," he answered; "when I was a gentleman I abandoned her; I will not reclaim her now that I am a ruffian, the offscourings of the kennel."

In vain did Launcelot endeavour to argue away such objections, his stubborn pride was unyielding; yet it was evident that his heart strongly yearned towards his child. He said:

"Show me how I can serve her, and if my life—pshaw!" he added with a touch of his old manner, "that is a pretty offer truly, when I have been bartering it for twenty years for a few pence a day. But you know what I mean."

"I do," answered Launcelot grasping his hand, "and ere long may give you such an opportunity as you desire. Ask no questions now."

Ethel's face as he had seen it last had never from that moment faded from his vision, it haunted him night and day; she stood before him in his dreams so vividly that he

sometimes awoke and stretched out his arms and called upon her name, believing her to be bodily about him. At all times she was in the attitude of appeal, as though imploring him to help her. She never spoke, but looked ghostly and shadowy like a being of another world. These visions so strangely real produced a profound impression upon him.

The despotic violence and gross injustice displayed at Strafford's trial by the party whose cause he had once so enthusiastically espoused, had disgusted him and determined him to withdraw from its ranks. And thus another, the last of the golden apples of his youthful dreams had turned to dust and ashes, all the fair landscapes of Hesperides had faded and the world was an arid desert upon which the sun never shone. To organisations so intensely sensitive as his life is at the best but as the delusive promise of an early spring—one day bright, genial, blossom-bearing as summer, the next come frost and snow and desolation. He was weary of the burden of flesh, and longed to cast it off—and sleep.

Out of such dreams and musings there came an idea of attempting the Earl's escape. He was wealthy, he had no child, nor friend nor relation for whom he cared. Might not that wealth be employed in saving Ethel from a broken heart? What joy would it be to him to sacrifice it for such a purpose—and life with it. Few men were incorruptible if the bribe were large enough. What if it were possible to bribe his gaolers—the Lieutenant of the Tower? Such things had been done. He was ready to expend his fortune to the utmost farthing. He had sounded Bellasis upon the subject and speedily discovered he would be ready to join in any plot, however hazardous, for such a purpose.

The next thing to be done was to open a communication with the Earl, for little could be accomplished without his concurrence. He discovered that Mr. Greenwood being a clergyman was allowed free access to the prisoner; they were old friends, and he sought out this good man whom he knew to be all-devoted to his master and broached his half-formed purpose. Mr. Greenwood caught at it eagerly, as he would have done at anything a hundred times more desperate that offered hope of rescuing his dear lord. He promised to break it to Strafford, and if he found him willing open negotiations with the Lieutenant, than whom no other person could have

so good an opportunity of doing so. This was arranged on the day the Lords assented to the bill, but was only to be mooted in case the King's resolution should give way.

There was one circumstance that gave Launcelot uneasiness, and that was the frequency with which the evil form of John Savile crossed his path; he scarcely ever stirred abroad without meeting him, until he began to believe that these frequent encounters were due to espionage. He knew that having voted against Strafford's death he was regarded with suspicion by the extreme party, and he also knew that Savile's heart was full of malice against him.

He was told of the King's signature by Mr. Greenwood on the night it was given, and of the letter the Earl had written. This noble sacrifice, so in harmony with Launcelot's highly strung ideas of honour, moved him to tears and gave a new impetus to his exertions. He also learned that with much reluctance the Earl had consented to permit negotiations to be opened for his escape, placing the matter entirely in the hands of his faithful chaplain, but stipulating that nothing must be done to compromise his honour.

"I have heard the Lieutenant, Sir William Balfour, is poor and ambitious," said Launcelot, "and, it is whispered, not over scrupulous. An offer of twenty thousand pounds, which you may increase to the utmost limit of my fortune, may tempt such a man."

"God will bless you, Mr. Franklin, for this noble conduct," said Greenwood, with deep emotion. "I could scarcely believe there was generosity so disinterested in the world; and you and my lord were not even friends, and there are other reasons of which I need not speak."

"Say no more," interrupted Launcelot; "I give but that which is of no value to me."

He then changed the subject to the plan he had devised, should the Lieutenant be found amenable. It was arranged that a hundred men composed of the Earl's Irish troops, which still remained faithful, should under the command of Hornby be secretly introduced into the Tower, so as to overcome the resistance that might be offered and to exonerate Sir William by giving an appearance of force to the escape. The overtures were to be made the next morning.

And with this understanding they parted.

Once more, in consenting to this plot, Strafford was induced to act against his own desire for the sake of others. For to him Death took rather the form of a merciful Angel than that of the King of Terrors. His frame worn by disease and racked by pain had been for years a perpetual agony to him; the almost superhuman fortitude with which, sick almost unto death, he had borne up and fought his foes throughout that long trial, had exhausted the last remains of his strength both of mind and body, and but for the children, whose future was so involved in his, and for that dear wife whose very existence might be snapp'd by his death, how gladly would he have laid down his weary head and slept for ever. His mouth was full of the bitterness of Dead Sea Fruit; he had "sounded all the depths and shoals of glory;" he had soared to all but the highest pinnacle of human greatness and found only barrenness and misery; he had devoted health, brain, being to his Sovereign—and had been rewarded by perjury and ingratitude. His career was ended, his work was done; why should he desire to linger upon earth a fallen friendless man?

Thus, to Launcelot Franklin and to Thomas Wentworth, to the dreamer and enthusiast, and to the man of action, to those two lives—sundered as the poles in their meaning, their growth, and fruition—was equally revealed the mockery of all earthly aspirations.

Each day news was brought to the Earl of the disorders and tumults by which his enemies were forcing his condemnation, and of the pressure that was being put upon the King. That last thought greatly troubled him; for, although, since a long time, he had not been able to close his eyes to the falseness and weakness of Charles's character, his heart still clung to him with all its old devotedness and with that heroic and chivalrous loyalty, the mainspring of all his actions, which still dominated every other feeling of his soul.

Thus it was only after a long and bitter struggle between love and duty that he composed that letter to the King.

Yet, when he heard how readily his sacrifice had been accepted, it was, perhaps, the saddest moment of all his life. Not because he had not tendered it in all truth and faith, but his thoughts *would* have him change places with the King

and himself—and so *contrast* ! The halo with which he had surrounded his idol faded, and left it but a poor thing of clay.

He raised his eyes to heaven, murmuring, “*Nolite confidere principibus et filius hominum, quia non est salus in illis.*” (Put not your trust in princes, nor in the sons of men, for in them there is no salvation).

This was his only reproach against his perfidious master.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAST APPEALS.

ALL this time we have forborne to speak of Ethel ; for what could be said, save that she suffered all the anguish that humanity can suffer—and live. Like the ancient painter we have preferred to draw a veil over the anguish we could not paint.

She and the children had taken up their abode in the house in the Austin Friars. Her woman's instinct, not dazzled, like her husband's mind, by the glamour of an heroic loyalty, had always mistrusted the King's firmness ; and upon hearing that the lords had given way it seemed to her that all hope was gone. Strafford told her of the letter he had written.

"I have done but my duty," he said.

That same night she heard the King had signed.

Again must the veil be drawn.

The next morning, without acquainting anyone save Mr. Greenwood who accompanied her, with her purpose, she ordered her coach to take her to Whitehall. She went to make a last appeal.

As she alighted she saw the King and Queen, who were departing for Hampton Court in order that they might be away from London when the execution took place, just about to step into their coach. With all speed she ran towards them, her hood falling back, her hair floating in the wind—broke through the astonished courtiers and attendants

that surrounded the carriage, and casting herself upon her knees, seized the King's hand as his foot was upon the step following the Queen, who was already within.

Charles had never seen Ethel but once—just after her marriage—and did not recognise her. Thinking it was some mad woman who had a design upon the King's life several hands were about to roughly seize upon her, when Mr. Greenwood, who hurried to the spot as hastily as his limbs would permit, cried out in a loud voice :

“Hold ! it is Lady Strafford.”

At the name all fell back, and Charles became pale as death.

“What would you, madam ?” he faltered, trying to raise her.

“My husband's life, Sire,” she sobbed, her knees clinging to the ground, her hand holding his fast. “You cannot abandon him after your solemn pledge ; you gave your royal word not a hair of his head should be touched—confident in that pledge he placed himself within the power of his enemies. You cannot know how he loved you !—how devoted he was to you !”

Anguish choked further utterance, and she could speak no more, save with her eyes, which were far more eloquent than her lips.

The King was greatly agitated ; but he answered coldly :

“The Earl of Strafford of his own free, unbiassed will released us from our pledge. All that can be done we have done, and will do to save him, of that you may be assured.”

He made a sign to one of the attendants to take her away. She offered no further resistance, and he hurried into the coach and seated himself beside the Queen, who had lain back against the cushions all this time, and they immediately drove off.

Mr. Greenwood, placing his arms round her half-fainting form, led her gently towards her own carriage.

“False, perjured King,” she said ; “and it is for his service my noble husband has sacrificed himself !”

“Thou art late, sweetheart,” said the Earl when she arrived at the Tower.

She told him where she had been, and the result. He

made no comment; but an expression of intense pain crossed his face.

"Courage, dearest, for my sake," he said folding her in his arms.

"For your sake, ay," and her head fell wearily upon his shoulder.

In the meanwhile Mr. Greenwood had obtained a private interview with the Lieutenant, and was proceeding with much caution and diplomacy to sound his disposition towards the Earl. Finding it not unfriendly he went on with equal caution to the proposal for the escape and the terms attached thereto.

Sir William seemed somewhat startled; spoke of the danger such an attempt would bring upon him, and of his honour as the trusted servant of his Majesty.

"You could not better please his Majesty than by doing this," urged Greenwood. "It is not by his will you hold the Earl prisoner, but by the usurped authority of the Parliament, to which you have never sworn allegiance."

Sir William, whom the chaplain could perceive was not unmoved by his offers and arguments, answered that he would give that day to consideration as it was too perilous a matter to be hastily decided upon.

This was but reasonable, and Greenwood left him in a very hopeful frame of mind, and at once sought the Earl to acquaint him with the result of the interview.

Strafford made no comment upon it. Ethel, who had been told nothing of this plot lest it should raise false hopes, was in the apartment, but the chaplain spoke in too low a key for his words to be audible. She thought she could perceive, however, by the expression of his countenance, that something favourable had transpired; but as her husband did not make any communication she repressed her curiosity in deference to his tacit desire.

When she left for the night, under the escort, as usual, of Mr. Greenwood, she ordered the coachman to drive to Chancery Lane.

"You are curious to understand the meaning of such a direction," she said to her companion. "Casting about in my despair this morning, a thought came into my mind—a poor, forlorn hope that only desperation could suggest—that I would make a last appeal to Mr. Pym. All tell me he is

my husband's deadliest enemy ; but surely his vengeance should be satisfied by this time."

The chaplain was greatly shocked and amazed at such a proposition. "You, the Countess of Strafford, abase yourself to this man !" he exclaimed.

"Do not talk to me of barren titles at such a time as this !" she answered. "I am but a woman, and the most wretched one that breathes the air this day. The wife of the humblest labourer who is happy in the safety of husband and children, is infinitely above me and would not change places with me."

"If my lord were to know of it he would never forgive you," urged Greenwood. "Think of the degradation it will be to his honour !"

"If I can but save him let him for ever banish me from his presence, and I will still be happy. Perhaps it is weak and base in me to sue to an enemy, but to me all considerations are as nothing against my husband's life."

"You are all goodness—an angel upon earth, my lady," said the old man ; "but do not go to this man, and, even though it is against my lords wishes, I will tell you of a plan which promises better than yours."

"How noble, how generous this is of Mr. Franklin !" she exclaimed when he had revealed the plot to her. "And to do all this for us, who, I fear, have cast so dark a shadow over his life. How can we accept such a sacrifice at his hands ? Were not my dear husband's life concerned——"

There she paused. Before that consideration all scruples gave way.

"And you will not go to Pym ?" asked the old man.

"Yes," she replied determinedly ; "were he to yield to my prayers there would be no necessity for this desperate attempt which may fail."

"But you will let me be present at your interview ?"

"No ; I will see him alone," she answered, firmly. "You shall wait without the gate."

Finding further remonstrance useless he was fain to acquiesce.

Pym still occupied his old chambers in Lincoln's Inn ; and at this time, notwithstanding his high position, he lived as plainly and unostentatiously as ever.

It was nearly dark when she arrived at the gate. The

porter said he believed Mr. Pym was in his rooms, which were upon the first floor directly facing the stairs.

The door of the apartments so indicated stood open ; the outward room, which was an antechamber, was unoccupied, but in the dim light she saw another door within. She was crossing the floor to knock at this when she heard the sound of voices. Two men were conversing in the inner chamber loudly enough for at least the subject of their conversation to be distinguished in the anteroom. The first words she heard were so important as to at once arrest her attention.

"I am quite certain there is a plot afoot for the escape of Strafford," said a voice. "Years ago, the first night this Franklin came to the house in the fields, I told you I suspected his good faith, that he was secretly the friend of Wentworth, and now you see that he voted against the bill ; from that day I have had him closely watched, have found him frequently holding private and earnest conversations with persons who favour the Earl—Bellasis, Greenwood the chaplain, and others even more suspicious. These circumstances, and others too subtle to be defined, give me assured conviction there is a plot for the escape of this traitor."

"An extra guard of a hundred men upon whom we can firmly rely must be put into the Tower this night," answered a second voice. Then it added : "Is the Lieutenant to be trusted ?"

"I cannot tell that, but the best policy is to have him so well watched that he dare not be dishonest."

Here Ethel, hearing a movement of feet, retreated hastily to the stairs, not without a sense of shame at having played the eaves-dropper ; but this conversation so nearly concerned her that it had held her rooted to the ground. At one moment she was on the point of abandoning the object that had brought her there, and hurrying to Mr. Greenwood to acquaint him with her discovery ; the next, she reflected that the plot being suspected and so certain to be defeated, there was greater reason than ever that she should try this last resource.

While thus meditating she heard footsteps in the antechamber. The landing on which she stood was quite dark

and her dress was wholly black, so that by retreating into the furthest corner, at the foot of the upper flight of stairs, there was little danger of her being observed.

Immediately afterwards a man passed out of the door and made his way down the stairs.

After a little pause she summoned courage to retrace her steps and knock timidly at the inner door. It was opened by a domestic; immediately opposite, sitting at a table covered with papers, she saw the big form and stern face of the man she sought. At the sight of that figure, which recalled all the horrors of the trial, her courage nearly failed and the utter hopelessness of her errand seemed revealed to her.

Pym, looking up and seeing it was a lady, rose. The servant stood aside; and Ethel advancing a few steps threw back her hood and said, in a faint voice—

“You are Mr. Pym, I think?”

He did not recognise her, but he was quite startled by that white face so full of woe. He bowed, staring at her with wondering curiosity.

“I am Lady Strafford,” she faltered.

He changed colour at that name and his features became cold and stern.

“Madam,” he said, “if you are here to intercede for the Earl of Strafford, for I can discover no other cause for so humble a personage as myself being honoured by so distinguished a visitor, I would spare you the pain of solicitation; it is useless.”

“All I would ask for is his life,” she pleaded, her courage rising; “banish him to the remotest part of the world, confiscate his lands, all that he possesses—he cannot harm you in exile—he would not again mingle in State affairs even though he were entreated to do so—he has long been weary of them—he would long since have resigned all his employments but the King would not permit him—his health is broken by his great labours—all he needs is repose, obscurity—he will be dead to England, ay, dead as though the grave indeed were closed over him—he will live only to me and his children, who will daily and hourly bless you for your mercy: if you put him to death you will kill our hearts with him.”

She had sunk upon her knees, and few could have resisted that appeal. Even Pym was agitated, and pitied her; but there was no relenting in that heart of stone.

"I was not your husband's judge," he replied. "I did not condemn him, but the votes of both Houses of Parliament and even the master who profited by his tyranny. I had but one voice."

"But that was the most potent of all," she interrupted; "you have the power to save his life."

"And if I had, if the raising of my little finger could stop the axe I would not do it," he answered sternly. "I speak in no harshness to you, madam, whom I pity; but were you my own sister I would not say less nor stay justice upon that man."

There was a finality in those words, against which all protest was useless.

She rose from her knees—he would have assisted her, but she shrank from him—gathered her hood about her face with the calmness of despair, and turned to leave the room. He held the door open and motioned the domestic to light her down the stairs.

He was pale, and his hands trembled when he again seated himself before his papers. That face haunted his memory for many a day afterwards.

As Ethel descended the last stair she came against a lady cloaked and masked, who was at that moment entering by the outward door; but it was too dark to distinguish anything beyond the dim outline of a figure. The lady stood back to let her pass, peering curiously through the eyes of the mask. Then she took her way up the staircase and entered Pym's apartments.

He looked surprised at this new intrusion, but recognising his visitor before a word was exchanged, desired the domestic who was with him to quit the room.

When they were gone the lady threw aside her mask.

It was Lady Carlisle.

"Who was that woman I met below?" she inquired, sharply.

"The Countess of Strafford."

"Indeed!" she answered in an altered tone. "She came I suppose to plead to you for his life."

"She did."

"And what was your reply?"

"Do you seriously require an answer to such a question?" he demanded contemptuously.

She dropped her eyes to the ground.

"And what has brought you here, Lucy?" he asked with an inquisitive look.

"You have not visited me for several days; since you would not seek me I have sought you," she replied, her eyes avoiding his.

"There is something more than that," he answered, his gaze still fixed upon her.

She made no response for several minutes. Then she said, abruptly—

"Were it not possible to save this man's life—banish him; even imprison him for the rest of his existence?"

She did not dare to look up as she spoke those words.

An evil fire kindled in his eye and a bitter sneer curled his lip as he replied:

"This is what I have long expected. Truly, women are like dogs, and love those best who beat them worst."

"He has been much punished," she answered humbly; "years of bodily pain have worn him to the shadow of his former self; his face might melt a heart of stone; his thread of life is almost spun; might not the little that remains be spared to him? His fall and degradation alone would kill him."

"Did I think he would die to-morrow morning I would have him executed to-night," burst forth Pym vindictively. "Fifteen years ago beneath your roof I swore I would bring him to the scaffold; and I always keep my vows."

"I ask his life in the name of our love," she pleaded, almost passionately. "I have given you all; can you refuse me this?"

"And in the name of *my* love I refuse to spare a rival who has perhaps more of your heart still than I have," he replied bitterly.

"This is mere folly to put me off my suit," she responded in the same tone. "What love could I have for a man who has so degraded me as he has, who hates me as he does; who, if I were now to kneel at his feet and implore his pardon, would spurn me? It is not my heart that pleads for him but my conscience. You know that his trial has been a pretence; that he is not so guilty of what he is charged with as you or I; that his execution will be a murder. Your soul may be callous to such thoughts, mine is not; and I feel that the memory of my share in this business will gnaw there evermore."

"A woman's evermore is a month at farthest. There is nothing thou couldst ask me, save this, I would refuse thee, Lucy. I would sooner give thee my own life than his."

His voice had changed to tenderness and he had thrown his arm soothingly around her. But there was no relenting to her prayer.

As this is the last time she will appear in these pages, we will subjoin a few words of valediction.

It was indeed some time before she recovered the shock of Strafford's death; but no grief nor remorse could take permanent hold upon the heart of Lucy Carlisle, and after a time she became as brilliant, as beautiful, and intriguing, as ever. She outlived her generation; she saw the downfall of Pym, the death of Charles, the establishment of the Commonwealth, and figured in the gay Court of the Restoration.

Mr. Greenwood had from the first been quite certain Lady Strafford's errand would prove fruitless, and all he felt was intense mortification that the wife of his noble patron should have humiliated herself to stoop to his direst foe.

"I do not think of that," she answered; "but if it should please God to prolong my life beyond that of my dear lord, I would not have the reproach upon my conscience that I had neglected any chance, however improbable, of saving him."

But great was the old man's grief and alarm when she related to him the conversation she had overheard.

"So ends our last hope, does it not?" she asked.

He could make no reply. And she needed none, for his
once told her all.

It was necessary to warn Franklin and Bellasis of this
scovery without loss of time, and after conducting Lady
rafford home he hurried away to seek them.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAST PARTING.

THE King's signature obtained, the Parliament hurried on the execution, and the 12th of May was fixed for the last act of the tragedy.

It was the evening before, and Strafford had gathered round him his wife and children to take his last leave of them.

During the last two days Ethel had sunk into a kind of stupor that looked like resignation, but which was more alarming than the most violent grief. She was sitting at his feet, as she used in the old happy time, her head bent forward upon her breast. On either side, and between his knees, were the children. The boy and the elder girl alone seemed to have a due appreciation of the awfulness of that moment; the others were weeping and sobbing, as children do weep, with their eyes and not their hearts—April showers that in a moment turn to sunshine. The Earl was addressing his son whose hand he held. His voice was calm, for he was fully prepared for the end, and it was to him to show an example of fortitude; but the boy's deep sobs severely taxed his endurance.

"Be sure," he said, glancing towards the kneeling figure at his feet, and his voice faltered for a second, "that you give all respect to my dear wife, that hath ever had a great love unto you. Never be wanting in love and care to your sisters, but let them ever be most dear to you. Serve God

diligently morning and evening and have Him before your eyes in all your ways. And above all," he added, in a yet more impressive tone, "be sure to avoid as much as you can to inquire after those who have been sharp in their judgments towards me; and I charge you never to suffer thought of revenge to enter in your heart, for I forgive them freely. Be ever true and loyal to your King—God bless him!—and never give a thought to life or interest when your love and duty to him should be considered."

Then, with a few loving exhortations to the girls, he pressed them in his arms and held them there for some seconds while he breathed a silent prayer. At a sign, Mr. Greenwood, who had been a weeping spectator, came forward to take them away; but they clung to their father's breast with shrieks and cries and could not be entreated to leave him, and so the attendants were compelled to forcibly remove them. The agony of this scene almost broke down the Earl's firmness.

When they were gone he and Ethel were alone. She had not once raised her eyes all this time, had given no sign of consciousness except the tightening clasp of her fingers and the occasional convulsive heavings of her chest.

"And now, sweetheart, it is our turn," he said, raising her in his arms.

"Not *yet*," she answered with a shiver; "let me remain with you till the—last. It is our last night on earth; let it be passed together. Oh, dear husband, do not refuse me this."

He would fain have spared so many hours of agony to both, but he could not refuse such a prayer.

Quiet and docile as a child who has won its way she again sank down at his feet in the same attitude as before. This quietude was far more trying to him than would have been tears and sobs.

"Remember, dearest," he said, laying his hand upon her head, the gold of which was already streaked with silver, "we have the Christian's hope; our parting is but for a time. It will be but as though I had gone on some long, long journey. And even in the course of Nature this poor frail body that has been long decaying could but have lingered a little while upon earth; my enemies have shortened its stay scarcely at all, and 'Death is an end of every worldly

sore.' Do you recollect these lines of Chaucer I have so often read to thee :

What is this world ? What askē men to have ?
Now with his love, now in his coldē grave,
Alone withouten any company."

He could feel her shiver ; that was her only answer.

"Mr. Greenwood," he went on kissing her, "has the disposition of such remnants of my fortune as my persecutors will leave at my disposal. Lady Clare, their grandmother, will provide for the children, and there will be enough to render you——"

"Do not speak of these things ; I cannot bear it," she interrupted, entreatingly.

"Well, well, I will not ; they are all safe in our good Greenwood's hands. Ah, if they would but have left you the old home."

"I could never have looked upon its walls again," she answered. "Do you remember the voices in the wind the last night we were there, 'Nevermore, nevermore, nevermore !' There is truth in omens."

All this time she spoke quite calmly, and with dry eyes. He was trying to draw her tears.

"By-and-by," he went on, "when time has softened your affliction, I would have you go there once again and wander among our old favourite haunts where we were once so happy ; especially I would have you linger in that spot where I first won from you the confession of your love."

"I shall never see them again," she answered in the same tone, "Nevermore, nevermore, nevermore. Did not the voices in the wind speak to me as well as to you ?"

"These are but fancies, dearest. For God's love do not look so cold and senseless—relieve your heart with tears."

"I have no tears," she answered ; "they are all shed."

Then with a sudden change of tone, she added presently :

"Lady Carlisle prophesied truly, did not she ? As truly as the winds !"

"Why do you speak of that wretched woman at such a time as this ?"

"She said I should bring you to shame and destruction, and I have done so," she resumed not heeding his interruption.

He reproved her in almost stern accents for such a belief. "Political causes and the malice of men, not my domestic relations nor the paltry spleen of a woman, have destroyed me," he said.

She shook her head and answered, "I know it is as I have said, I feel it here," pressing her hand upon her heart; "I have destroyed you."

In vain did he alternately soothe and rebuke, she only shook her head with the same immovable persistency.

At length he grew seriously alarmed and ordered his physician to be sent for.

He came, and looked grave when he saw her; he called Strafford aside. "The Countess," he said, "can never endure the agony of the last parting; her brain would give way beneath it."

"What can be done? She insists upon remaining with me until the last."

"To-night, my lord, I would advise that a powerful narcotic be administered, the effects of which will not pass away for some hours."

"I understand you," said the Earl sadly. "I have all faith in your judgment. But use all care with that precious life."

All the evening she remained in the same stupor, making no movement except he offered to let go her hand or shift his position; then she would cling closer to him and look up at him with imploring eyes and whisper, "Do not leave me."

Towards night he gave her the narcotic with his own hands, saying it was a soothing draught the physician had ordered.

She drank it off without a word, seemingly unconscious of what she did except that she shuddered slightly after swallowing it as though the flavour was nauseous.

For a time it produced no effect. But by-and-by she said, "I am growing so very sleepy; take me in your arms and then I shall be sure you cannot leave me, for I shall wake if you attempt it."

And he took her in his arms as he would a little child,

and she nestled close to his breast, and wound her arms clingly about his neck ; and then she laid a little time looking up into his face with wide open eyes ; but gradually the lids began to quiver and steal down lower and lower until they closed.

And she had looked her last upon him.

Then did his fortitude break down, and his tears fell like rain upon the sleeping face, and his frame was convulsed with agony. But for this relief it seemed as if heart and brain must have burst. After a time he again mastered himself. It was his last weakness.

It had been arranged that she should be conveyed home, and an attendant presently entered to announce that the coach was waiting and all was ready. He cut off a long lock of her beautiful hair, that he had so loved to play with and fondle in the old time, pressed it to his lips, and damp as it was with tears thrust it into his breast over his heart ; then with his own hands he wrapped the hood and cloak about her, held her in his arms a few moments longer, kissed her cold lips, and with a long deep sigh passed her to the attendants whose faces were wet with tears.

And so they parted—for ever !

CHAPTER VIII.

UPON THE SCAFFOLD.

JOHN—now Sir John—Savile entirely frustrated the plot for Strafford's escape. The Governor of the Tower, made aware by the arrival of an extra guard that something had transpired, hastened to take the initiative by informing Pym of the overtures that had been made to him. Orders were given that Mr. Greenwood, although still permitted to attend upon the Earl, should not be allowed to quit the Tower. Warrants were at the same time issued for the arrest of Bellasis, Godfrey Hornby, and Sir Launcelot Franklin; the latter was accused by Sir John Savile of having publicly declared that the trial of the Earl of Strafford had been grossly illegal, the evidence false, the witnesses suborned and intimidated, and that his execution would be but a judicial murder.

Some such animadversions had been uttered by Launcelot in a private room at the Cock Tavern, he believing himself to be unheard by any but his two associates; but Savile had followed them thither and bribed one of the drawers to listen at the door to their conversation, and this was the substance of what he reported.

Greenwood's warning, however, had placed the intended victims upon their guard, and they took the requisite pre-

cautions to elude the officers of the law. Upon which Sir Launcelot Franklin was declared to have forfeited his seat in the House of Commons, to be incapable of ever again sitting there, and to be a dangerous delinquent whom it behoved any man to capture wherever found.

These despotic measures were intended to strike terror to every supporter, secret or acknowledged, of the Earl. For within the last few days a reaction had begun to set in ; and every man who was not blinded by fanaticism or swayed by personal feelings began to feel some sympathy for the once great minister whose condemnation had been obtained by such doubtful means. Launcelot and his friends discovering this change in popular feeling had been emboldened by it to the conception of a desperate plan, which was no less than to attempt the Earl's rescue from the very scaffold. Bellasis knew several officers of the guard to be secretly inclined to the prisoner, and had received intimation from two or three that they would not offer much hindrance to an escape should it be attempted.

By means of a lavish expenditure of money they got together a considerable number of men, disbanded soldiers and others, and hoping, on the spur of the moment, to obtain assistance from a portion of the crowd and neutrality from the rest, resolved to attempt this *coup de main*. Bellasis was sanguine of success ; Launcelot silent and depressed. Well disguised they had taken lodgings at a tavern on Tower Hill, where for safety they occupied one sleeping-room between them.

The Tower clock had just tolled twelve. Bellasis was fast asleep, worn out by fatigue, for they had been working hard that day preparing for the eventful morrow. But Launcelot and Hornby were too wakeful for repose. The latter was smoking ; the former, with his arms resting upon the window-sill, was gazing through the lattice out upon the night. Before him rose the black pile of the Tower, upon which the broad moon was shining radiantly, tipping the turrets with light.

Already a faint stir of gathering people came up from below.

One o'clock tolled, and neither had spoken. Hornby still smoked on, and Launcelot, deep in thought, had scarcely once shifted his position. There was not an incident

of his whole life that did not pass before his mind's eye during this vigil.

The sound of the bell roused him from his reverie, and, turning from the window, he said in a dreamy tone :

"The day has begun ; where shall we be this time to-morrow ?"

"Ay, where ?" echoed Hornby.

Again there was silence, and the hum and the stir below was growing louder and louder.

"I wonder if these sounds can be heard within the Tower?" said Launcelot, presently. "*She* is there to-night. Is she listening to them as we are ?"

"God help her, I trust not," answered Hornby.

"If we fail," again said Launcelot, after another long interval, "the Earl's death will be hers ; each day I have read it in her face."

Each day those two men, disguised, had hovered about the gates at the hour of closing, to catch a glimpse of her form as she entered her coach. And she had never suspected how much love there was near her.

The hum and the stir were swelling louder and louder, rising occasionally into shouts, songs, and laughter.

The second hour of the morning tolled. Then the third.

Launcelot threw open the casement ; the moon, though fast setting, was still shining brightly, and in the east the first light of dawn was breaking. Leaning forward he looked down upon the rapidly-increasing crowd that already numbered thousands ; upon the dark forms of the soldiers whose morions and halberds occasionally flashed in the moonlight, and upon that black shapeless thing around which all gathered.

"It is time," he said, turning to Hornby.

They had some difficulty in arousing Bellasis, who still slept heavily.

When they were ready to depart Launcelot said : "Let us shake hands before we go ; for who knows if we shall ever meet again ?"

No other word was spoken, but hands were grasped as only men standing upon the brink of the grave can grasp their fellows'.

They descended the stairs, passed out of the house,

separated and mingled with the crowd, seeking their adherents, who were to be recognised by preconcerted signals.

When the sun rose the whole of the great space of Tower Hill was closely packed with human beings and the windows and roofs were fast becoming human hives. Not since Mary Stuart had laid her head upon the block had there been so notable an execution, and all London was eager for the sight. And still, as the hours wore on, fresh numbers came flocking to swell the vast congregation and press the mass closer and closer.

The three conspirators had gathered their followers into three divisions, of which each took a command, and they had contrived to gather them close around the scaffold; not in a compact body, however, but here and there, with a wedge of the crowd between, so that when the movement came it would appear to proceed from all sides, and to be of much vaster proportions than it was. The guard was very strong.

Under the most favourable circumstances, however, the attempt was most desperate, the success most improbable. The plan of operation agreed upon was this: Launcelot, who had edged his way close to the line of soldiers that guarded the approach to the scaffold, was to give the signal of attack, at what he might consider the most favourable opportunity, force a way for himself and followers to the block and carry off the Earl while the others were employing the rest of the troops; horses were waiting at the end of Tower Street, and if these could be gained there would be every chance of escape. All depended on the rapidity with which the surprise could be executed.

The morning found Strafford calm and prepared. He had passed the entire night in religious exercises and in earnest conversation with Mr. Greenwood, to whom he confided his last wishes touching his wife and children. The Lieutenant advised that he should proceed the short distance from the Tower gates to the scaffold in a coach, alleging a fear that the mob might attack him. But what Sir William Balfour really apprehended was an attempt at rescue, in which, after what had recently passed, he might be implicated.

But to this Strafford, who was quite ignorant, however, of the second plot, objected.

"No, sir," he answered, "I have no fear of the people; neither do I care how I die, whether by their fury or by the hand of the executioner."

On his way he had to pass beneath the window of Laud's apartment, and on the previous night he had expressed a desire through Mr. Greenwood that the Archbishop might watch for his coming and bestow a farewell and a blessing upon him.

Laud was not made of the same heroic stuff as his brother in misfortune, and bore his imprisonment and danger with but little fortitude. The news of the Earl's condemnation greatly shook him, for he knew that it was the prelude to his own, and scarcely could he nerve himself to this sad leaving-taking. At length the tolling of the bell and the tramp of soldiers told him of his poor friend's approach. Trembling with age and agitation he tottered to the window; it was too high for him to catch a glimpse of more than the soldiers' halberds, but he stretched his hands between the bars in sign of benediction, and heard the deep well-known voice pronounce the words: "Farewell, my dear lord, and God protect your innocence." Then all strength deserted him, and he fell back fainting.

Guarded by a strong detachment of troops Strafford passed on his way with a firm step and upright carriage and a countenance quite placid, indicating neither fear nor bravado, but yet a due sense of the awfulness of his position. He had taken unusual pains with his dress, and attired in rich black velvet, his breast adorned with the blue ribbon and the jewel of the Garter, he looked rather like a monarch attended by his guard of honour than a prisoner proceeding to execution.

Great was the stir among the huge crowd when the gates were thrown open, and the appearance of a new detachment of troops announced the coming of the Earl. A moment before all had been turmoil—thousands of voices in talk and jest trying to make themselves heard above the general din, pushing and scrambling and horse-play; suddenly every movement was stilled, every head was turned one way, and a mighty hush like the dying murmur of a storm swept

from end to end of the living mass—and all was silent.

Slowly he marched on, hedged in by a treble line of soldiers, looking neither to the right nor to the left. As he neared the scaffold there rose a few howls and cries ; but the mass remained silent, awed by the grandeur of a presence before whose name all had once trembled. With the same firm tread he mounted the fatal steps, attended by Mr. Greenwood and a few others who still had the courage to call themselves his friends. But with these were mingled enemies who had come to gloat over this final triumph. And among them was one of the deadliest of all—Sir John Savile.

Upon reaching the scaffold Strafford placed his hand upon the block, and turning to the people addressed them in a loud clear voice, which was heard at some distance.

“I desire,” he said, “for this kingdom every earthly prosperity. While I lived this was my constant endeavour ; dying, it is my only wish. But I entreat each and all of you who listen to me to examine yourselves seriously, your hands on your hearts, whether the first chapter of the reformation of a kingdom should be written in characters of blood. Never let me be so unhappy that the least drop of my blood should rise up in judgment against any of you ; but I fear you are in a wrong way.” Then turning to his friends he took a solemn and affectionate leave of all, more especially of Greenwood, whose hand he held in a lingering clasp while he whispered, “Tell them my last thoughts were theirs and God’s.”

“Now,” he said, again speaking in loud, clear accents—“I have nearly done. One stroke will make my dear wife husbandless, my dear children fatherless, my poor servants masterless.”

Then he knelt down with Mr. Greenwood and silently prayed.

His words had been listened to with the most breathless attention, and one or two attempts at interruption had been quelled by the people with savage energy.

In order to throw the soldiers off their guard, Launcelot had instructed those of his followers who were nearest the scaffold to raise occasional cries against the Earl, and gave the signal for one of these interruptions as he fell upon his

knees. Some bystanders, who evidently sympathised with the prisoner, raised their hands to cuff the fellows ; a slight skirmish took place, in which Launcelot, being in the midst of it, was much pushed, and in the scuffle his hat and a dark wig and beard he wore were knocked off, leaving his face quite bare.

From the steps of the scaffold John Savile had been watching the scene ; only the soldiers stood between him and the spot in which it was enacted. In an instant he recognised Launcelot and guessed the meaning of his presence and disguise.

“Stand to your arms, soldiers ! There are traitors among you. Kill that man !” he shouted ; and, leaping down the steps, drew his sword and pointed to Franklin.

Finding he was discovered, Launcelot also drew his sword and called on his men to charge ; but they were unprepared, and the accident had thrown them into confusion. The golden moment was lost ; and after making a feeble movement they retreated before the soldiers’ halberds. The same panic spread among those under the direction of Hornby and Bellasis ; not one would stir to the signal. The troops, now on their guard, formed a serried wall about the scaffold, and an officer galloped through the crowd, trampling the people under the horse’s hoofs, to the Tower gate for reinforcements. All was now lost. Bellasis was captured ; and Hornby, fighting furiously, at last fell covered with wounds and was crushed beneath the surging mass.

His prayer had been heard, he died as a soldier—and for the child whom he had so long rejected.

In the meantime, simultaneously with Savile’s words, and before the guards could understand their meaning or be warned of the danger, Launcelot alone and with desperate courage had cut his way through the line of soldiers and gained the first step of the scaffold ; but his weapon shivered to the hilt against one of the halberds, and he found himself within an inch of the point of Savile’s sword. Retreating a pace, he drew his dagger, but his foe pressed upon him, and crying out, “This is to pay a debt of long standing !” thrust at him with all the energy of hate.

Launcelot endeavoured to parry the lunge, but his dagger was scarcely drawn when Savile’s weapon passed

right through his breast. With a groan he fell to the earth.

At the same moment there went up a single cry of "God save the King!" followed by a great shout that swelled into a roar.

And the executioner was holding up a bloody head to the people!

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE FOOT OF THE SCAFFOLD.

ALL through the night and all through the fatal day that followed, Ethel, under the influence of the narcotic, lay in a death-like sleep unconscious of her widowhood. Mr. Greenwood, much alarmed at this comatose condition, called in the physician.

"There is no danger," he said; "she has scarcely slept at all these many weeks. Nature is recruiting herself; but for this, life or reason must have perished; this may save her. This trance will endure at least twenty-four hours longer, probably beyond that. Leave her in perfect silence, for any sudden awakening might prove fatal."

This was about six o'clock in the evening, and relying upon the doctor's dictum her attendants left her to her repose for the night; and worn out by the anxieties and woes they had shared with their mistress retired themselves soon afterwards.

But the physician was much out in his judgment, for a little before ten Ethel awoke with a strange suddenness. She sat up in bed, and by the light of the night lamp looked around. Her mind, still under the influence of the powerful drug, was blank; she could remember nothing. But after a time she slowly traced the events of the preceding day, which she believed to be that. She had fallen asleep in her husband's arms; she must have been conveyed away from

the Tower in that condition ; they wished to spare her the final parting and would rob her of the few remaining hours of his life. But they should not : it was still night ; she would return to the Tower, and if they would not admit her she would sit at the gate until—he came forth.

There was a fever in her blood that was fast mounting to her brain. She arose, dressed, put on the black-hooded cloak that she now always wore, opened the door without awakening her attendants, who slept soundly in an inner room the door of which stood open, and creeping stealthily down the stairs let herself out of the house.

She hurried swiftly through the narrow street, the fever growing stronger and her pulse beating higher as she went on. There were numbers of people about and much commotion, and twenty times during her journey she might have heard passers-by talking of the execution of the Earl of Strafford, for no person could talk on any other subject ; but her mind was so fixed upon one thought, and its powers were still so benumbed, that she went on like one in a dream, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, and pursuing the right road rather by instinct than by reason.

At length she arrived at Tower Hill ; as on the preceding night, the moon was shining brilliantly in a cloudless sky. She caught one glance of the black scaffold, and shuddering hurried to the gate.

A sentinel stopped her, asking what she wanted.

“ You must admit me at once to the Earl of Strafford,” she cried, excitedly ; “ I am Lady Strafford.”

The man thought she was a mad woman and laughed at her.

“ You’ll have to go somewhere else to find him,” he answered, roughly.

“ What do you mean ? ” she asked, faintly, an awful fear creeping over her.

“ Don’t you know he was executed this morning, yonder ? ” he said, pointing to the scaffold.

Without a word she turned away and tottered towards that hideous pile that stood out so grimly in the white moonlight. It was all solitary now ; silent and deserted was the vast space which a few hours before had been covered by thousands, not one of whom would have dared approach it in this ghostly stillness and obscurity ; the tramp of the

sentinels and the occasional clash of their weapons were the only sounds in the night air.

Across the moonlit road, with faltering steps, moved that solitary woman and her dark shadow, until she and it were lost in the depths of that deeper shadow—and seen no more.

As the hours wore on the moon sinking lower in the heavens was hidden by the tall houses, and other shadows crept towards the great blackness upon which the stars alone now cast their light. Still was heard the monotonous tramp and clash of the sentinels, the challenge and the word of command, as the guard was changed. But no other sound.

And so the hours wore on, until the stars began to fade before the brighter light that grew and grew in the east, until the gray began to tinge with crimson fire, and the sun rose gloriously, shedding its golden beams upon the minarets and dark walls of the Tower, and upon the roofs of the tall houses, and then upon the blackness of the scaffold.

And there at its foot, with upturned face upon which fell a ray of sunlight, lay a woman; beside her, half concealed by the cloth which covered the steps, with face also upturned towards the sun, lay the body of a man, and across his face were scattered some tresses of golden hair in which the sun's rays marked streaks of silver.

It was Launcelot.

Destiny had sundered them in life, and thus strangely united them in death!

THE END.

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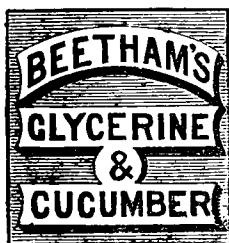
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